



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

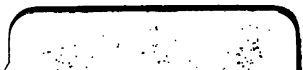
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600072546U





CHLOE ARGUELLE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE REBECCA RIOTER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



TINSLEY BROTHERS,
CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
LONDON.

1881.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

251. i. 408.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.



CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.	
SIR CADWALLADER RESOLVES TO PUT DOWN THE POACHING,	PAGE 1
CHAPTER II.	
CRUMPLES IN LORD PATRICK'S ROSE LEAVES, . . .	12
CHAPTER III.	
CHLOE IS DISCOMPOSED,	34
CHAPTER IV.	
THE LLUSERN,	63
CHAPTER V.	
MR FARREN HAS TO ENDURE A RUMPUS,	95
CHAPTER VI.	
A LETTER FROM EDITH,	125

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
BREAKFAST TALK AT CASTELL EITHIN,	144

CHAPTER VIII.

TIT FOR TAT,	172
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

LET'S GET UP A CRUSADE AGAINST HUMBUG!	221
--	-----





CHLOE ARGUELLE.



CHAPTER I.

SIR CADWALLADER RESOLVES TO PUT DOWN THE POACHING.

THE sonorous eloquence which Sir Cadwallader believed himself to have displayed solely for the benefit of his own family and the Osnaburgh Joneses had had another hearer of whom he knew nothing, in the shape of one of his gardeners, who had happened to be raking flower beds outside the drawing-room just

at that time. The windows being open, this man had easily overheard what was said; and when he retailed the baronet's sentiments that night to a select circle at the public house which he frequented, they were received with an amount of derision which would have made Sir Cadwallader's hair stand on end.

"So the fool do think as one word from he shall stop us off poaching?" observed one man with a sneer. "Well, well! think it he, then, think it he! There be no harm in that, whatever."

"I believe in my heart," remarked a second, "that when he do take a bit of notice of any of us, and speak to us—no matter what he shall say—he do suppose as we be all struck of a heap like with joy, and be bound to love him—ay, and die for him too, for what I know—for ever after!

But 'tis all one to he which of us it be, for he do never know one poor man from another. 'Tis only that 'tis his fancy to make believe to be fond of us."

"Yes, sure!" chimed in a third. "There was last year that he was come three times to our house, and each time he was ask my missus the same thing—how was the children getting on at school? But you know as we haven't got none now, since we buried the last of our little ones this fourteen months back. The missus was tell him so, too, the first time as ever he was ask about them—but how should he trouble to remember whether such as we has any children or not? So he was ask the same thing again whenever he do come, though it do make my poor missus cry to be minded of 'em. What was that matter to he?"

"Ah," said a fourth, "most like as he do

forget that we and our childer can ever be alive at all 'cept just when he do be looking at us or thinking of us."

"Well, well," said another, "he can talk so much as he do please—but a lot of differ he shall find as it do make to we whether he do 'prove of a thing or not, whatever!"

.

In due course of time the Pigjobbers' Mutual Improvement Society dinner came off, and so also did Sir Pomponius Ego's speech. It was highly eulogised by the *County Chronicle*, because that paper, being on his side in politics, of course thought he could do no wrong; and was equally abused by the *Imperial Illuminator*, which was on the other side, and therefore thought he could do no right. He stammered, declaimed, and enunciated grand sounding words and ponderous sentences, expressing

nothing but truisms with his usual unwieldy facility ; and he aired the similes of the Bulwark and the Nasmyth hammer very much to his own satisfaction, and amidst great applause. That most of his hearers did not at all understand what these things were, in no way interfered with their appreciation of his eloquence. Their attention was especially attracted to the words by the emphatic manner in which he rolled them out. They concluded that a bulwark must be some new kind of house, or else nose-ring for bulls ; and though they could form no conjecture as to the meaning of a Nasmyth hammer, yet the bit about empty eggshells was clearly comprehensible to everybody ; and as bulls and eggshells were obviously most appropriate topics to introduce at an agricultural dinner, they applauded him lustly. This applause appeared to him a

further and convincing proof of his own unbounded popularity amongst the lower classes, and he went about, more inflated than ever with self-esteem, pluming himself openly on the good effect which his speech would probably have produced, and asserting that he did not anticipate there would now be any more cause for talking nonsense about "poaching epidemics" in that neighbourhood.

To express this confidence so publicly was rash of him, as the *Imperial Illuminator* heard of it, and at once held him up to scorn in its columns. The honourable gentleman, who imagined himself able to suppress poaching with pompous platitudes, was compared to Dame Partington endeavouring to dry up the sea with her mop, and many other bitter and uncivil things were said of him, which annoyed and made him wince—

though he professed to regard them as utterly contemptible and beneath his notice .

The worst of it was that the poaching continued to increase and flourish notwithstanding both the speech and the applause ; and it became more and more the general impression that the whole population of the district was concerned in the matter. This opinion was quite detestable to the baronet, and he opposed it stiffly—almost as if it were a personal insult. Indeed it seemed to him that his dignity was involved in the question ; for how could the wishes of an individual so beloved and revered as himself go for nothing amongst his poorer neighbours ? Would it not be monstrous for him to be subjected to the slights and annoyances which might fall to the lot of less popular men ?

It was only a few nights after the Pig-

jobbers' dinner that his own preserves were attacked; whereupon he at once announced that now was the time when it behoved his people to come forward and show their good feeling towards himself and their abhorrence of lawlessness, by assisting in the discovery and conviction of those who had injured him. He confidently appealed to them to do this.

When nothing came of the appeal, and the poaching was repeated, and the offenders remained undetected as before, he became extremely irate; but still stuck obstinately to his original opinion that the disturbances must be caused solely by intruding strangers, and that they could not possibly be the work of his attached and faithful "humble friends." On this point he held forth at great length to whoever he could get to listen to him—and declared furthermore that he

feared it would be necessary to bring the Nasmyth hammer into play at last, and that he should have to make it his business speedily to bring about the expulsion and punishment of the guilty parties. So big did he talk, that even the *Imperial Illuminator* was somewhat impressed, and thought it judicious to abstain from making fun of him as usual, till it should see whether he might not, indeed, be going to accomplish some wonderful deed before which even enemies would be constrained to bow down.

As for Lady Gough, when he inflicted on her one of his long-winded harangues about poaching, she would listen with a pleasant smile and sufficient show of interest to satisfy him, and then go on her way rejoicing that it was over, and concern herself no jot about the whole matter. For, as she told Chloe, game preserving, and keepering, and

poaching, and all those sporting affairs, were quite out of *her* department, and whether they went right or not no one could lay any blame on *her*. All that sort of thing was entirely Cadw's look-out—*she* had nothing to do with it, and wasn't going to worry herself over it.

Chloe's own sentiments on the subject were rather vague ; for though she felt sure poaching was wrong, yet still there was undeniably something attractive about it. It was wild, lawless, and enterprising, and the idea was inexpressibly breezy and refreshing after the insipidity of the society life she had been recently leading—it was something like the change of going from a heavy, oppressive atmosphere of fog into a good, stiff, westerly gale. And now and then she found herself wondering what Mr Lloyd would think of it if he were there ;

not because his opinion could make the very slightest difference to her, of course—only that it's amusing sometimes to hear what views one's acquaintances entertain about things.





CHAPTER II.

CRUMPLES IN LORD PATRICK'S ROSE LEAVES.

THE Patrick Fitzshannons left England immediately after their wedding to spend the honeymoon abroad. It was Lady Patrick's intention to return home at the end of a month, and her husband, seeing that she wished it, affected to be quite of the same mind, declaring that the plan suited him exactly, and that a month would be precisely the pleasantest time possible to stay abroad just then. He was shrewd enough to have understood the desire of having some one identified with herself which

had chiefly induced her to marry him, and in order to gratify this desire he meant always to pretend that his own sympathies, tastes, and interests were thoroughly in harmony with hers. By this means he hoped to keep her always fond of him, and disposed to be liberal in money matters, as much of his future comfort would depend on her being in that frame of mind. And, therefore, when the question of the length of time they should remain abroad was mooted, he agreed with everything she proposed, and thought prudent to say nothing as yet of a very different scheme which he cherished privately and by no means despaired of carrying out eventually, which would keep them out of England for a very much longer period than a month.

Travelling about luxuriously with plenty of money at command, and somebody to take all the trouble off his shoulders was a state

of existence which he thoroughly enjoyed ; and he sighed after the clear, sunny skies and soft climate of the south as infinitely preferable to the cold, foggy, harsh English winter and spring. Want of means had hitherto prevented his indulging so expensive a fancy, but now that he had married a rich wife it needed only that he should gain her consent in order to be able to gratify his longings. Much would depend on whether she enjoyed being abroad or not, and so when they started on their honeymoon he watched anxiously to see what sort of a traveller she was, and was delighted to find that she took with the utmost kindness to both travelling and a foreign life. With a woman of those tastes there would surely be no great difficulty, he thought, in contriving to get the tour prolonged bit by bit to an indefinite extent—perhaps even till such time as the end of

May, and the London season should again render England endurable. Having this object in view he began, when the appointed month was drawing to a close, to throw out hints about how pleasant a trip they were having, and what a pity it seemed to curtail their pleasure; and finally suggested that there was no particular reason compelling their immediate return to England, and why, therefore, should they not extend their travels beyond the time originally proposed? But his bride's reception of the idea was a decided blow to his hopes.

As regarded the charmingness of travelling abroad she was entirely of his opinion; but for all that—a month was the time for which she had settled to stay away from home, and at the end of that period she meant to go back and see to her farming and other concerns.

“Could not these concerns get on a little

while longer without his darling Constance?" he asked. To which his darling Constance replied that as to that she did not know, but at all events should not make the experiment, as she intended to go back when she had said. For one thing she had only left instructions for as much work to be done as would fill up about a month.

He reminded her of the post, and inquired whether it would not be possible by its means to convey to the bailiff or agent orders for fresh work. She answered, however, that a letter would by no means take the place of personal supervision, and asked him if he had forgotten the old saying that the master's foot is the best manure for the land? a saying which he had never heard before and thought sounded nasty—though he was, of course, careful not to betray either his ignorance or his disgust.

As she, though perfectly pleasant and good tempered, stuck firmly to her point, the end of it was that he had to abandon the plan on which he had set his heart, lest if he continued to advocate it longer she should begin to suspect how very little he cared about things that interested her. And therefore they returned to Court Beta at the appointed time—he internally anathematising the farm and business matters of all sorts and kinds, and carefully concealing his vexation under an outward demeanour of cheerful agreement in his wife's proceedings.

A strong will, and the command of the purse strings are, no doubt, powerful allies in dealing with a lazy and impecunious man—and so Mrs Foldes had remembered, when debating the important question of whether or no she should accept Lord Patrick Fitzshannon.

Court Beta was on the English side of the border between England and Wales, and though some way off from Castell Eithin, was not out of driving distance. The return of the Patrick Fitzshannons from their honeymoon was the signal for that inundation of visitors which invariably follows the home-coming of a bride and bridegroom, and which in the present instance flowed in from unusually remote distances on account of the title and reputed good looks of the bridegroom—two qualities which made him an object of special curiosity amongst the country neighbours who had not yet seen him. Many people who, if the inmates of Court Beta had been poor, untitled, or in no way distinguished from the common herd, would have declared it absurd to think of calling upon people so far off, and cruelty to animals to make such a journey on wheels, now main-



tained that it was absolutely imperative on them to go and call, that nothing was more churlish than to seem backward about welcoming home a newly-married pair, and that the horses were dreadfully in want of exercise and would be all the better for a good drive. And as reasons are always largely influenced by inclinations, it naturally followed that the desired visit was paid regardless of trouble or inconvenience.

When the flood of morning callers had abated, the Fitzshannons thought it incumbent on them to make some return for the general welcome they had received. Accordingly they determined to ask all acquaintances in the neighbourhood to a huge garden party, and to precede the afternoon entertainment by a luncheon to as many people as could be comfortably seated in the dining-room. The Castell Eithin party were in-

cluded in the latter division, but only Lady Gough and Chloe accepted the invitation—Sir Pomponious being just then too much taken up with concocting plans for the annihilation of poachers to leave home for even one afternoon.

The proposed entertainment was very much to Lord Patrick's liking, for he was epicurean in his tastes, and thoroughly appreciated that extra care which even the best of cooks is sure to bestow upon the food when company is expected, and there is unwonted scope for the display of culinary talent. Luncheon, too, was always an important matter in his eyes without any additional and extraordinary embellishments—he not being of the number who affect to despise that meal because they find it disagree with them or spoil their dinner. Towards the middle of the day he was invariably possessed of an

excellent appetite, the process of gratifying which he regarded as not only enjoyable in itself, but also as having three highly agreeable concomitants, viz., pleasant anticipation beforehand, a digestive cigar immediately afterwards, and finally the comfortable and contented state of mind resulting therefrom. And on days when there was nothing amusing to be done and time hung heavy on his hands, he would look forward to luncheon as a sort of bright and refreshing oasis to break the dreary pilgrimage necessarily intervening between breakfast and dinner.

On the morning of the day of the big luncheon and garden party at Court Beta, his lordship was ensconced in a most seductive easy-chair in the smoking-room. An amusing French novel was in his hand, between his lips was a cigar out of a box of specially choice Habanas which his wife had

just presented to him, and he was altogether in a state of placid enjoyment—both actual and prospective—when the door opened suddenly and Lady Patrick came in. Putting down his book on the table he looked up at her with an affectionate smile and honeyed expressions of pleasure at her arrival.

“Yes,” answered she laughing, “that’s all very well, but I’m afraid you won’t be so glad when you know what’s brought me here, for the fact is I’m come to rout you out! You see people may be beginning to arrive now at any minute, and you really must come and help me do the civil and talk to them till lunch is ready.”

This meant that he must leave his comfortable chair in order to go and stand about in the drawing-room finding seats for other people, and must give up his delightful book and cigar in order to make conversation for

hungry guests ! The prospect was not a fascinating one, and he tried to escape his fate by declaring that he would follow her to the drawing-room in a few minutes, but that just at that moment he was very busy—thus taking refuge in that commonest and most generally false excuse put forward by human nature when called upon to do something which it thinks it ought, but is sure it does not want to do. But his wife had had enough experience of the ways of mankind to make her incredulous of the business plea. Instead of at once retiring, as he hoped, she went to the table and took up the book which he had laid down open at her entrance.

“ *Vingt ans après,*” said she, shaking her head with a smile as she read the title. “ Well—no doubt studying that is a most important avocation ; but still I somehow fancy that no very serious harm would

result from putting it off to another time !”

Reflecting privately what a nuisance any one was who, when a fellow *said* he was busy, wouldn't he satisfied without trying to ferret out what the business might be, he hid his face in his hands with a playful pretence of extreme penitence at having done wrong.

“Don't blame *me* for the falsehood, at all events, dearest,” said he ; “it's all your own fault for giving me such excellent cigars ! They're good enough to make any man tell a story to get off leaving one half smoked ! Of course I'm coming at once if you really want me, darling—but don't you think you'll get on just as well, or even better, without me considering how many of the people are still strangers to me ?”

“Certainly not,” she answered. “You know I've always told you that I shall rely

upon you at all my parties to amuse the young ladies. I want you to make that your special province, for you're just the person to do it. The poor things never feel themselves properly treated, unless there's a fair sprinkling of male creatures provided for them, and they're sure to be delighted to have such a romantic-looking, handsome man as yourself—now, don't be vain, my lord! I shouldn't say it if it weren't true—to flirt with even in spite of his being matrimonially disqualified. So come along like a good boy, and make the most of your natural gifts to assist me!"

With these words she closed the novel, and deposited it on the highest shelf in the room, and then asked if she should help him out of his chair, or if he would like her arm to lean upon?

Evidently he would have to go, and there

was no getting out of it without departing from the rule of conduct towards her which he had laid down for himself as most expedient. So he resigned himself to the inevitable with every outward demonstration of willingness, getting up and kissing her, and making droll remarks as he accompanied her cheerfully to the drawing-room. But meanwhile he was grumbling in his heart, that though this wife of his was always good tempered, yet that she was so cursedly firm, that there was never any possibility of moving her one hair's-breadth when her mind was made up. And it dawned upon him also that however delightful an institution a luncheon party might be when it caused him no trouble, yet that its charms were considerably diminished if it entailed on him the nuisance of amusing the guests beforehand. That duty should, in his opinion,

fall exclusively on the lady of the house, and he felt very much aggrieved at being called upon to assist in its performance. He was quite sure that that dear little girl he loved in Dublin would never have expected him to do anything of the sort. And he sighed regretfully as he remembered her, and thought how certain she would have been to spare no pains to smooth away even the very slightest crumple from each one of the rose leaves whereon he desired perpetually to lie. The fact that his own hand had forged and fastened the chains that now bound him did not make them any the pleasanter when they chanced to gall a tender place on his sensitive skin.

The visitors quickly began to arrive; and information as to the state of Lady Patrick's farm was asked for with as much solicitude as though its well-being were a matter of

vital interest to the inquirers. Which piece of affectation resulted from an article of faith commonly held in the school of Humbug to the effect that, if X has a hobby it follows as a matter of course that for Y and Z to talk to him about it—however ignorant they may be of the subject, and however absurd and unintelligent may be their remarks—is a polite mark of attention to X, and an infallible way of making themselves agreeable to him, and getting into his good graces.

“I’ve been quite anxious to see you, dear Lady Patrick,” cried Mrs Gawain Smith, a silly little woman who neither knew nor cared anything as to the difference between a cabbage and a mangel, and rather piqued herself on having a talent for original ideas; “for I wanted so much to hear how you found your farm prospering on your return? I do trust it was none the worse for your

unwonted absence? I'm sure it would be quite too dreadful to have anything go wrong with such excellent farming as yours—everybody would take it to heart as if it were their own!”

The hostess was amused at the incessant harping on one theme, but was getting rather bored with it too, so she thought she would treat her questioners to a good dose of details on the subject, and see if that would keep them quiet.

“I found things going fairly well,” she replied; “but of course not exactly the same as if I'd been here. The harvest was too long about; the ricks weren't thatched in good time—some of them aren't done even yet; the trifolium was forgotten to be sowed in the stubble where I'd settled it was to go; the bailiff missed Oldgate sheep fair, where I hear that good strong ewes were selling at

twenty-five and thirty shillings—think of missing such a chance as that when I was wanting to increase my head of sheep! Then the hens that had done laying weren't fattened off before they began to moult as they ought to have been; the cows were let to go back in their milk because the men didn't take the trouble to draw cabbages or to crush enough cake for them; and there were sundry other small errors of the same kind which wouldn't have occurred if I'd been at home. Things never go quite as well when one isn't on the spot to superintend them, you know."

Mrs Gawain Smith listened to all this without in the least understanding it until the cake for the cows was mentioned. Having never heard of linseed and cotton cake, she took it for granted that the article of which Lady Patrick spoke was the same kind as what human beings ate, and though some-

what surprised to find that cattle were fed on it, determined not to show her astonishment.

“It’s funny for such nice soft stuff as cake to want crushing, isn’t it?” said she; “but I suppose it has to be done for fear the stones in the raisins and currants should hurt the poor cow’s teeth or disagree with them. Did it ever occur to you to try *sponge-cake* for them, Lady Patrick? Having no stones in it, that would save the trouble of crushing, wouldn’t it?”

The hostess looked inquiringly at Mrs Gawain Smith to see if she were in sober earnest or not; then, seeing that the little woman was quite serious, Lady Patrick controlled her inclination to laugh, and replied gravely,—

“No, it certainly never did occur to me before, and I’m much obliged to you for the idea. *Sponge cake* as cattle food—it’s really an invaluable hint to farmers!”

Many of the bystanders experienced some difficulty in keeping their countenances ; and the joke was still further enhanced by Mrs Gawain Smith's evident conviction that she had struck out one of her usual brilliant ideas, and that Lady Patrick's commendation was no more than what was justly due to her genius.

"It's only what's constantly happening," laughed Mrs Smith, with an air of entire self-approval. "I so often find that a mere humble outsider like me is quicker to think of something new in regard to a subject than the professionals who are always at it ! And what dear, pretty, quiet cows yours look ! Quite models to my mind ; and I'm sure you ought to show them, and take prizes with them everywhere, you know."

"If you had to do with them I doubt your finding them such models as you imagine,"

returned Lady Patrick. "They are unfortunately imbued with the idea that obstacles were made to be surmounted, and that as a hedge is an obstacle, it is, therefore, a thing to be got over by every conscientious-minded cow. Whatever the other side of a fence may be like, whether more attractive than where they are or not, seems quite immaterial to them. The mere fact of its being on the other side and not on their own is sufficient to make them eager to inspect it closely—in which characteristic they are a good deal like many human beings, I think! But here they come to announce lunch—let us go in and feed!"

And so Mrs Smith's farming conversation came to an end, as the party gladly began to pair off and adjourn to the dining-room.





CHAPTER III.

CHLOE IS DISCOMPOSED.

IT happened that Mr Scriven was amongst the party assembled for lunch at Court Beta, he having come into the neighbourhood at that time on a visit, and having been included in the invitation to the people with whom he was staying.

Now Mr Scriven had made up his mind in London that there either actually was, or else was very likely to be, "something on" between Miss Arguelle and Mr Lloyd; and the rumours he had lately heard

of the attentions which the latter was supposed to be paying to Miss Farren had surprised him not a little, for he prided himself on being particularly sharp and accurate in his perception of such matters, and could by no means believe himself to have been altogether mistaken in the present case. He had made up his mind to take the first opportunity of trying to find out whether his judgment had been at fault or not; for though he did not at all want to marry Chloe himself, and had no earthly interest in the state of her affections, yet he was always possessed by an insatiable curiosity about any unpleasant subject that a person might wish to conceal, and by an intense love of ill-natured gossip, which made inquiries of this kind thoroughly congenial to him. The present meeting with Miss Arguelle afforded him just the occasion he desired, and

directly luncheon was announced, he advanced and offered her his arm to the dining-room.

“So by all accounts your cousin Miss Farren has made a grand conquest,” said he as soon as they were seated and supplied with preliminary oysters; “do you know if she has accepted him yet or not?”

Chloe had heard nothing of the matter, and was considerably astonished.

“I haven’t an idea,” she replied; “I didn’t even know there was anything in the wind there. Who’s the gentleman?”

“Oh, well, if you know nothing about it,” answered he, “pray don’t repeat it on no better authority than mine. Of course it may not be true after all, and I’m most careful never to gossip and spread false reports, because I do so detest that sort of thing. However, I certainly heard it

spoken of very confidently—they said that at the Courtlys' dance last week young Lloyd devoted himself entirely to her all night."

Mr Scriven watched her narrowly whilst he spoke to see if she would betray any consciousness of Roger Lloyd's being in any way different from other men to her.

Young Lloyd! She had been on tenter-hooks to hear what name was being coupled with Edith's, and when it came it gave her a shock. She was immediately conscious of feeling pained and wildly desirous to avenge her suffering on some one or other—either Mr Scriven, or Roger, or Edith, or whoever came handy; it was something like that insane thirst for retaliation upon any one within reach, which even the mildest individual is apt to feel if suddenly struck sharply on the nose. However little she might care for Mr Lloyd,

however much she might look down upon him, yet had she not brought herself to make up her mind to accept him if he should ask her? And would it not therefore be a blow to her vanity if he never did ask her after all? And Edith too, of all people—how hard if it should be her own especial friend who carried him off from her!

These first thoughts were instantly followed by the recollection of where she was, and the importance of not letting people suspect that piece of gossip had any greater interest for her than any other that she might hear. In spite of all her efforts, however, a faint flush came over her face; and as her knowledge of this, and vexation at not being able to repress it, only deepened her colour, Mr Scriven began to congratulate himself on the success of the trap he had laid for her, and to feel confirmed in his original opinion that she had been more

or less smitten by Roger's golden attributes—for that she should have cared for anything else about him would have seemed to Mr Scriven too unlikely a supposition to be worth taking into consideration. Great, indeed, would have been Chloe's indignation had she seen what was passing in her neighbour's mind at that moment, and how close a guess he was making at the secret she was anxious to guard. But, fortunately, she suspected nothing of it, and only felt fierce with herself for having been so childish as to blush. Her voice and manner were under better control than her colour, and in them there was no sign of alteration as she continued the conversation so calmly as to puzzle the astute Mr Scriven, and shake him in the conclusion he had come to so confidently a moment before. For he hardly believed it possible for a girl who was only just "out" and

not much more than seventeen, to assume indifference so successfully and so readily.

“Dear me!” she observed; “well, certainly that’s quite news to me; I’d no notion it was going on. And you say his admiration is so evident as to be unmistakable, don’t you?”

“So I was told,” answered he; “but I haven’t had a chance of seeing it with my own eyes as yet. However, we shall probably be able to judge for ourselves by-and-by, as somebody said they would both be here this afternoon.”

“Oh, then I suppose he’s visiting somewhere in this part of the world, too,” replied Chloe; “Edith’s coming, I know, as she’s staying at a house near here on her way to us—she’s to get to Castell Eithin to-morrow or the day after. But do look at Lord Patrick! What can make him get out of

the window and go scrimmaging off across the lawn in such a hurry ? ”

Lord Patrick was at that instant in a most unenviable frame of mind, for the fates had ordained that his luncheon was to be interrupted, which was a thing he particularly hated at any time—and what made it worse on the present instance was that the interruption had come at an especially trying moment. On first entering the dining-room he had surveyed the good things spread out on the table, and quickly settled in his own mind what his luncheon should consist of. In this private bill of fare was included a certain lobster mayonnaise, garnished with anchovies, which looked remarkably fascinating. The dish was popular, and began to disappear with alarming rapidity. Seeing this, and that the anchovies—for which he had an especial weakness — were

nearly all gone, he thought he would do well to secure himself a helping before it was too late, and set off round the table for that purpose. But before he could reach the coveted dish, his wife happened to look out of window and see some threatening black clouds, which aroused her vigilance on behalf of her farm.

“Oh, Patrick!” she exclaimed, as he laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder in passing by her chair. “Do see how bad the weather looks all of a sudden! And I know that that last rick of barley is still unthatched—it hasn’t even got a cap to it. There’s Martin crossing the six acre now—do, pray—would you mind going over to him as fast as you can, and telling him not to lose a moment in getting back to the farm and covering the unthatched rick with a couple of the biggest tarpaulins? I shall

be so much obliged if you will. He's quite certain not to think of it for himself. It'll never do to leave that splendid lot of barley without anything to cover it, and rain looking so likely, will it?"

Lord Patrick was dismayed at this sudden attack. He dared not refuse to pleasure his wife; but he looked wistfully at the diminishing mayonnaise, and foresaw that there would be none left by the time he should have returned from taking her message to Martin.

"Of course not, my love," said he; "it's quite out of the question, as you say. Only don't you think one of the footmen could take the message? He would do as well as me, wouldn't he? and then I can still help you with our company here. But, of course, I'll go in a moment, if you wish it."

"How do you suppose a flunkey would ever get over the fences with his calves

and silk stockings?" she returned, laughing. "If I send him, he'll lose half-an-hour trying to get at Martin by the road; and then if the rain is coming, it'll have come before anything is done. And, besides that, the man would be very likely to make some hash about the message, and you see it really is an important matter to have it delivered quickly and accurately. If you're quick, and start at once, you'll catch Martin before he's out of sight. It will be so good of you to do this for me!"

This then was the explanation of Lord Patrick's sudden and hasty exit from the window, which had attracted Chloe's attention. Go he did, however unwilling, and on his way his thoughts turned discontentedly on his lost independence and his interrupted luncheon. Would he not have been happier, thought he, with that Irish love,

who would certainly never have dreamt of expecting him to go off on messages like a common errand boy, and leave a lot of greedy people to eat up all the tit bits of a mayonnaise, meanwhile? And errands about such stupid, trumpery things too! What did the drenching of a beastly heap of dry stalks matter in comparison with his comfort? But then no doubt if he had been married to the Irish girl, there would have been no tit-bits of mayonnaises to leave—and as that reflection occurred to him, it went far to reconcile him to the existing state of affairs.

Fresh visitors began to throng in very soon after luncheon was over, and happily the threatening clouds cleared off, and the afternoon was fine.

Never before had Chloe felt so impatient of her fellow-creatures and their twaddle. What Mr Scriven had told her had thrown

her mind into a ferment, and she did crave to be alone—to be able to have just a few minutes to herself, in which to look into her own excited feelings, and explain them to herself, and find out why she should be so unaccountably discomposed at hearing that Roger Lloyd was *perhaps* gone entirely out of her reach. There was still a *perhaps* about it, however, and possibly it might be mere unfounded gossip after all. When she should see Edith and him together she would be able to make a pretty good guess—why wouldn't they make haste and come, so as to put an end to her suspense? Till their arrival she would have given anything to get away from every one, and have time to think quietly; but solitude was just then impossible. Mr Scriven, in particular, had attached himself closely to her, in order to be near when she should meet her cousin

and Mr Lloyd, and see whether there was anything unusual in her manner to them ; so she had to go on talking and laughing and playing her part like the rest, and crush back every trace of perturbation. She began to wonder whether many of those around her were also concealing ruffled and anxious spirits under the conventional mask, and doing violence (like herself) to an intense longing to escape from humanity for a while. And there arose in her breast an angry sense of rebellion against social exigencies, and a desire to cast off the yoke which necessitated such unnatural behaviour. Was Humbug to meet her at every turn as the sole law of life ? Was it never to give way to anything else ?

When Edith arrived she appeared to have some especially interesting piece of news to communicate, judging by the eagerness with which she made her way towards Chloe.

“I’m so glad you’re here, Chloe darling,” she exclaimed, “and what a duck of a hat you’ve got on—mine isn’t bad either, eh? It’s quite new, and I made it up from a picture in the *Elégances Parisiennes*. I do hope you like it! But something has happened that I know’ll interest you—and I’ve been dying to tell you about it.”

Chloe felt satisfied that it was all true—Edith was engaged to Mr Lloyd, and she, Chloe, was now about to hear it. Her heart sunk strangely; but she controlled herself too well for the spying Mr Scriven to detect any change in her manner as she answered,—

“Well, what is it? Something worth making a fuss about, I hope. I like hearing news.”

“It’s about that housemaid of ours that I was so afraid of—Anne, you know,” replied Edith; “don’t you remember her?”

This wholly unexpected reply lifted the weight off Chloe's spirits.

"Yes," answered she, wondering why she suddenly felt so much happier, "I remember Anne quite well—what of her?"

"Why, such a sad thing happened," returned Edith, who had by this time drawn her cousin out of earshot of the bystanders; "she picked a lot of sloes and cooked and ate them—how she can have swallowed the nasty things I can't think! And they disagreed with her so that she died. And now that she's dead, poor thing, it seems so wicked and unkind of me to have fancied she would do us some harm—I do wish I hadn't! If I hadn't had that prejudice against her, I should never have taken the clairvoyante's nonsense to heart as I did; but of course her death *shows* it was all rubbish, and I've been quite at my ease again ever since. Only it seems quite

shocking to be so relieved at a person's death, doesn't it? Oh, what a delicious toilette that is to the right—do look! It does vex me so you've no idea, to think how unjust I was to poor Anne!"

"Poor Anne!" echoed Chloe. And whilst Edith prattled on gaily upon all kinds of different subjects, Chloe kept trying to account to herself for the very queer sensations she had experienced that day, and for the impatience with which she awaited the coming of Mr Lloyd, in order that she might see him and her cousin together. Considering that she didn't care a scrap about the man, she couldn't make out why she should be so put out at the idea of his marrying some one else; she had only thought of marrying him for his money, so any other rich man would do just as well. Of course, however, seeing another woman in the position she had des-

tined for her own would necessarily convey a certain sense of failure—yes! no doubt that was the explanation of her present discomfort, since the taste of failure is always more or less bitter—however little value may be set upon the object failed in.

Roger arrived late at Court Beta, and his behaviour was such as entirely to confirm the rumour mentioned by Mr Scriven. He lost no time in joining Edith, and devoted himself to her with what Chloe regarded as a sort of subdued air of proprietorship, which seemed to her perfectly ridiculous—but then being upset and out of sorts, she was perhaps not quite a fair judge.

“At least he needn’t go on in that conceited way,” thought she indignantly, “until he knows whether he’ll be accepted or not. However well aware he may be that there’s not a girl in the place would say no if he

asked her, still he shouldn't show it so openly. And I can't think how Edith can put up with his conceit and look so pleased as she does. Really I've no patience with her! It wouldn't be bad fun to spoil sport a bit by drawing him off in another direction and showing him that he isn't quite so much master as he probably imagines."

For the moment Chloe felt strongly impelled to interfere with them and be disagreeable to them in some way or other—either to try and get up a hot flirtation with Roger on her own account, or else to make fun of them, and say spiteful things about them. But then she repented of the uncharitable impulse as she watched the pair, and observed how thoroughly happy Edith seemed to be at the attentions she was receiving.

"If Edith really cares for him, then she

and not me is the proper person to have him, seeing how profoundly indifferent to him *I* am," thought Chloe. "I wonder if she *does* care for him, or if it's only his money and so on that attracts her? If so, she's no better right to the prize than any other girl who may have a fancy for it!"

The flirtation between Edith and Roger was sufficiently marked to be noticed by every one, and was a theme on which Lady Gough discoursed largely during the drive back to Castell Eithin that evening. Her comments occasionally diverged into reproachful expressions of surprise that Chloe should have been so silly as never to have made any efforts at securing so desirable a young man for herself.

"I'm sure I did all I could for you," complained Alice; "I gave you *every* opportunity, and feel quite positive that you might have

had him *easily* at one time if you'd chosen to try. I'm certain he'd a hankering after you in London, and that you could have spun him directly with a little encouragement, and making yourself decently agreeable to him. But there! When you won't do a thing you won't; and it never was, and never will be, the least use expecting you to please any one except yourself. Such a catch as he is, and such credit as it would have done me if you had married him! However, after all, Edith is a cousin, and was under my wing when first she met him—if anything *should* come of this flirtation it won't be as bad as though he were going to a perfect stranger. Of course I'd a great deal rather have him as a brother-in-law than a cousin-in-law, but it would be a comfort to think that he hadn't gone right out of the family."

The drive home was a long one, and Chloe

had to listen to this and much more in the same strain, and to force herself to take part in the conversation as though the subject were one in which her own feelings were in no way interested. She found this dreary and depressing work enough; but that night as she lay reviewing the day's events in bed, a fresh idea suddenly occurred to her, which was a great deal worse than anything that had gone before, and pained her terribly.

She understood perfectly that Alice expected great things of her, and intended her to make a brilliant marriage, which should be a source of glorification and triumph to her relations. Well—supposing she were not to fulfil this expectation, and perhaps not to marry at all, then would Alice change towards her, get tired of her, and want to get rid of her, so that she would find herself at last subside into the melancholy

position of an inevitable but undesired inhabitant of the house where she had previously always been considered a welcome and indispensable belonging? The mere notion of such a thing was horrible, and Chloe recoiled from it with loathing, telling herself that Alice loved her as dearly as she loved Alice, and that it was imputing treachery thus to doubt the reality of Alice's affection.

Yet the detestable idea was not to be set aside so easily. What reliance could be placed on the words and deeds of any one so accustomed to make false professions as Alice? Would not such habitual insincerity be likely to taint everything about her — even the attachment professed for a sister? What guarantee was there that one who was a humbug to the whole world should not be the same to her own family? Chloe would

have been reassured if she could have recalled even one instance of Alice's being fond of a person from whom nothing was to be gained in return—but somehow when she came to ransack her memory, no such instance could be found. Poor Chloe got quite wretched over this abominable possibility that had occurred to her ; and it had also the effect of placing marriage with Mr Lloyd in a still more favourable light than before. He had it in his power to confer upon her something even beyond what she had hitherto thought of ; for she felt pretty sure that as Mrs Roger Lloyd and a prospective countess there would be but small danger to her of change in her sister's affections ; and therefore he could give not only rank and riches, but also security in the love of the person to whom she clung most fondly as the only near relation belonging to her in the whole world.

Would not any other rich man do as well as Roger though, since she certainly did not love him in the least? Well—yes—perhaps—only then some men were so dreadfully disagreeable or objectionable in some way or other; and at all events he wasn't *that*. She had a vague sort of idea, too, that there was something reliable about him, and that his affection would be a thing which might be trusted to more safely than that of most of those "*grands faiseurs de protestations*" with whom she lived and had to do. Why should that be, she wondered—what should make him more real and unaffected than other people? Perhaps it was because he had everything he wanted, and so could afford not to be a humbug. If so, that was a reason the more in favour of marrying him, since his wife also would of course be elevated to the same superiority, and would be above

any necessity of being insincere. But then to gain that desirable position there would have to be the preliminary bit of humbug of pretending to love him when she didn't—and somehow Chloe found it uncommonly difficult to reconcile herself to the thought of doing that. There was a spring of honesty within her, which, if only she allowed her natural self fair play, would infallibly keep her from whatever was false and deceitful. What a pity it seemed to her that she could not have fallen in love with him correctly, so as to be able to contemplate him matrimonially with a clear conscience! But there! the thing was impossible to her, so it was no use pretending anything different.

Still—the more she considered the matter, the more obvious became the advantages to be obtained by marrying him, and she began seriously to regret the small use she had

made of her past opportunities for making an impression on him. After having degraded herself so far as to make up her mind to become his wife before even having set eyes on him—and this was a thing that stuck in her throat horribly—it seemed stupid not to have gone through with the affair and really done her best to carry out the programme. It was all because she had been so sensitive about the ill-natured things that lookers-on were certain to say about any girl who was civil to him—things which she had resolved never to have said about *her* if she could help it. Ah! if only she could have her chances over again it should be different. In her present frame of mind she thought that it would be quite easy—provided no prying censorious eyes were watching—to unbend more than she had ever yet done to him, to make herself more agreeable, to be more

chatty, amusing, and natural. After all the game was not lost yet—his present flirtation might come to nothing still.

But then there was Edith to be considered—supposing she were really and truly in love with him, it would be very hard on her to lose him—Chloe would certainly never wish for such a thing as that to happen. Not even in thought would she stoop to anything so mean and ungenerous as wanting to carry off a man from a girl who was in love with him. Her nature was both too proud and too honest for that. So if Edith cared for him, then Chloe must hope for the flirtation to end in marriage, and that was all about it—but, oh dear ! what a trouble and a worry life was !

Hence it is apparent that Chloe's peace of mind was thoroughly upset by the events of the Court Beta party ; and that she had not

yet learnt the truth of those maxims of Thomas à Kempis : " All our peace in this miserable life must be placed rather in humble endurance than in the absence of contradiction ;" and again : " He who best knows how to suffer will possess the greater peace."





CHAPTER IV.

THE LLUSERN.

THE contemptuous manner with which Sir Cadwallader had at first been disposed to pooh-pooh the poaching stories as gross exaggerations of mere trivial offences, had gradually given way before accumulated and overwhelming evidence of the vigorous and daring way in which the poachers were carrying on their iniquitous proceedings, and his anger was now thoroughly aroused. It was clear that he and the class to which he belonged were being set at defiance by creatures of

an inferior order. The worm had not only forgotten its proper insignificance and turned, but had also arrogated to itself the powers of mischief of a serpent—nay, even, if popular opinion were correct, of a serpent that had been warmed in his own bosom !

The thing was not to be endured. The Nasmyth hammer must be brought into play to stamp out disorder. He would insist on the assistance of the police ; he would write to the *Times* ; he would himself go out with the keepers ; he would leave no stone unturned to maintain his dignity and to put down those who snapped their fingers at it. It was a source of regret to him that the House of Commons was not then sitting, so that he might have appealed to that all-interfering body to grant a Royal Commission for inquiring into the best method of suppressing poaching at Cwm Eithin.

Fresh cases occurred almost daily ; on the river salmon spearing was carried on openly by torchlight, and on land, game of all kinds was netted, shot, and trapped. The depredators mustered in such large numbers that the keepers would not oppose them without a strong force, and the poachers were extremely skilful in selecting for their operations the least defended spots. Sometimes they were seen by one or two watchers who hurried off to give the alarm and procure assistance ; but by the time reinforcements arrived the foe had invariably vanished. Poachers were here, there, and everywhere, and there was no getting hold of even one of them. And since this state of affairs was hardly likely to go on without the sympathy and co-operation of the natives, and since, also, the baronet's preserves suffered quite as much as those of any one else, it became

painfully apparent that the bulwark of personal loyalty and attachment behind which he had reckoned on finding shelter, had either never been erected at all, or else subsequently crumbled away

“Chloe,” said Edith, as she happened to meet her cousin in a corridor on the night after her arrival at Castell Eithin, “I didn’t remember there being any village down to the west, just where a bend of the river comes in sight from my window. I’m sure I never saw it when I was here before. Isn’t it something new?”

“There are no houses at all there,” replied Chloe; “what makes you think so?”

“Well, I was looking out of window in my bedroom not long ago,” answered Edith, “and felt quite positive I saw lights twinkling in that direction—so I thought of course

there was a new village sprung up. Come and see if we can see them still."

One of the housemaids, who was occupied in the corridor at that moment, heard what was said, and turned quite pale. On seeing Chloe about to accompany Edith to her room, she exclaimed eagerly,—

"Indeed, Miss Chloe, and do not you go with her—only for you not to be insulted that I do speak! 'Tis leave it alone is best for you."

"What makes you say that, Peggy?" asked Chloe, much astonished. "Why had I better not go?"

"You do have heard tell of the *canwyll-corff*, miss," replied the evidently frightened Peggy, sinking her voice to a mysterious whisper lest Edith should overhear her; "and that them as do see that light don't never live long after. Well—I am afraid in my

heart as it was that she was see ! Don't you go trying for to look on it too, Miss Chloe ; stay you here, and shut your eyes tight if you be near a window, whatever."

"Thanks very much for your anxiety about me, Peggy," returned Chloe, laughing ; "but I've no belief in your *canwyll-corff*, and strongly advise you not to believe in such nonsense either. However, I'm much obliged to you all the same for wanting to keep me alive if possible."

She followed her cousin to the bedroom window, where they stood straining their eyes into the darkness in hopes of seeing what Edith had seen. But it was in vain, as no lights were now to be perceived.

"They've gone now at all events," said Edith ; "but I'm certain I saw them before. I wonder what they were?"

"I'll tell you what," cried Chloe, as a

sudden idea flashed upon her; "I daresay it may have been some of those poachers who are all about the country now! Let's go and tell Cadwallader, and find out what he thinks about it."

They found the baronet closeted with the head keeper, who had just arrived with intelligence one of the watchers had given him to the effect that there was sure to be an attack made that very night on Sir Cadwallader's preserves at a place called Coed Collen—in English the Hazel Wood. Coed Collen was nearly a mile away from the house, and not far from the part of the river which was in sight from Edith's bedroom window. When the keeper heard of the lights she believed herself to have seen, he said that no doubt there had been salmon spearing by torch-light going on on the river, and that in all probability it was the same

lot of men who would be out again after the pheasants a few hours later as soon as the moon was up and giving a good light. All this threw the baronet into a great state of excitement. The poachers should be taken red-handed—a favourable opportunity for inflicting a crushing blow had at last arrived—the opportunity should be utilised to the utmost, poaching should receive such a lesson as should prevent its raising its insolent head again in that neighbourhood for a long time to come.

The poachers were almost sure to await bright moonlight before commencing their operations, and as the moon had not yet risen there was plenty of time for making preparations.

After a short discussion with the keeper, he despatched the man in search of as many watchers and keepers as could be easily

collected, with orders to bring them to the house, where the baronet would himself join them. Then he would lead his forces to Coed Collen, conceal them skilfully in the wood, await the arrival of the evildoers, and pounce upon them in the very midst of their misdeeds. It seemed to him that the plan could not possibly fail provided only the information received should prove correct, and the anticipated raid upon the preserves be made. As he changed his evening clothes for rougher attire and equipped himself for the fray, his old favourite Nasmyth hammer simile kept recurring to his mind, and he majestically told his wife that though the hammer had perhaps appeared somewhat tardy in its operation, yet that now at last it was about to be set in motion, and that its fall should resound far and wide, and produce an

effect corresponding to the magnitude of the disorder which had caused it to be employed.

The news of the impending row with poachers spread quickly through the house—partly by means of a highly conscientious footman who had deemed himself imperatively compelled by his duty to his fellow-servants to listen at the key-hole during most of the interview between the baronet and his keeper. When the exciting intelligence reached the kitchen, the housemaid Peggy had just related to an awe-struck audience how Miss Farren had indubitably seen the *canwyll-corff* that night; and, pleased with the sensation produced by this, Peggy was in the act of enhancing it by expatiating largely upon other cases where the apparition of the ill-omened lights had been followed by the death of those who had seen them, to her

own "certain sure" knowledge. The news about the poachers rather interfered with the effect of her harangue by diverting public interest to this fresh channel; and a sceptical groom, who had hitherto listened in silence, now ventured to suggest that perhaps what the young lady had seen might have been nothing worse than poachers' lights after all, and that there might be some equally easy way of explaining Peggy's other histories also if only the whole truth could be known about them. But this was a theory which met with but very little sympathy from the circle assembled in the kitchen, the greater part of whom had a decided preference for the supernatural rather than the natural as the most probable and rational manner of accounting for whatever strange and unknown event might come under observation.

“ 'Tisn't only what I do know of myself,” said Peggy, looking indignantly at the heretical groom, “ but 'tis what I do have heard from father and mother and plenty more besides. *Canwyll-corff* do be *canwyll-corff* and nothing else, and nobody can say no different to that, whatever! And indeed to goodness it was not right to laugh at it as Miss Chloe did—no, not at all! It may be this, and it may be that, as Miss Farren was see to-night—'tis very easy to talk; but I wouldn't have been the one to see it myself, no—not if you was to give me a hunderd pound! Nam' o' goodness, what good would the money do me, and me got to die so soon?”

Which answer, though received with an incredulous sniff by Peggy's opponent, was considered by the rest of her audience to be a thoroughly conclusive argument.

Meanwhile Sir Pomponious Ego had been settling in his own mind every detail of the plan which was to result in the discomfiture of the poachers.

In one part of the wood to which he was going there was a queer, tumble-down old summer-house, which—to gratify some whim of the builder’s—had been constructed in the shape of a great lantern with large unglazed windows on all sides, reaching down to within a couple of feet of the ground. Hence it was commonly known as the Llusern, which is the Welsh word for lantern. The trees and underwood around had been cleared away for some little distance so that the house stood out isolated by itself in the midst of the clearing; and this clearing was surrounded, in its turn, by the wood beyond. It was the baronet’s intention to proceed straight to

the Llusern with all his men—thence scatter them about in various directions in ambush—establish himself within the summer-house, as his head-quarters with an immediate staff of one or two underkeepers—wait till the expected poachers should be thoroughly engaged in their nefarious proceedings—and then have all his men close in on and surprise them at a given signal from him. He was very much pleased with the powers of generalship displayed in this plan, and was of opinion that it would do him no small credit. Indeed, he could already imagine the encomiums to be showered upon him in in the friendly *County Chronicle*; and how it would recount the masterly defeat of the poachers who had long and successfully resisted the authorities, but had been at last forced to succumb before the admirable and energetic measures adopted by that

illustrious gentleman who so ably represented Cwm Eithin in Parliament—a representative of whom any constituency might well feel proud.

Paragraphs of this flattering and complimentary character floated pleasantly before his mind's eye as he set out from Castell Eithin with his men, and took his way towards Coed Collen—regarding victory as almost a foregone conclusion, and feeling towards the poachers a sort of half contemptuous pity for having to do with a man of such iron vigour and resolution as himself.

On the road to Coed Collen the party fell in with a couple of policemen who were pressed into the service by Sir Cadwallader, to be ready to take the captives into immediate custody when caught.

When they reached the wood the baronet halted his men for a few minutes, that he

might himself reconnoitre and see if any of the enemy were about — not that he really believed there was the least need for this precaution, but only adopted it because he thought it would sound well in that printed record of the night's deeds to which he was looking forward. He had quite made up his mind that the foe would not arrive for some time to come yet, and that he had ample time to spare ; so his reconnoitring was soon accomplished. He walked slowly up the middle of a ride, stepping on and cracking noisily several rotten boughs—then stood still and looked about him—then walked up a side path for about twenty yards. Here he felt desirous of blowing his nose, but, reflecting that this was incompatible with his present occupation, restrained the inclination, and again stood still for a few minutes listening. Next he went a short

distance in another direction ; and finally returned to his party with the information that all was perfectly quiet, and that there was no one but themselves about—and then he blew his nose with much satisfaction and a sense of great self-approval for not having done so before. After this performance the party went straight through the wood to the Llusern, where they were occupied for the first few minutes in stowing away some creature comforts in the way of spirits, and bread, and meat, which it had been thought prudent to bring out on account of the chilliness of the night. When this had been accomplished the baronet proceeded in his usual long-winded and wordy fashion to explain to his followers what he wished them to do, and to assign to them their various posts—during which address the men's attention was

naturally taken off from objects outside the summer-house and fixed upon the speaker. He was just concluding with the statement that the poachers would find themselves finely caught in a trap this time, and that he wished to have as many prisoners taken as possible, when the oration was cut short in a most startling manner by a rough voice outside, which exclaimed in peremptory tones,—

“Stay quiet for your lives, men! There’s better than a score of guns pointing at you, and if so much as a man of you moves—we’ll fire!”

Utterly surprised and taken aback, the inmates of the Llusern looked around with suppressed oaths and ejaculations of astonishment. In the dim light of the rising moon they could make out that they were completely surrounded by men advancing on all sides from amongst the trees into the

clearing round the summer-house—that many of these men had aimed their guns at it—and that one had come nearer than the rest, and was speaking to them. This man had evidently heard the end of Sir Cadwallader's speech, for his next words were,—

“Who's caught in a trap now, I should like to know; is it you or us, I wonder? And a fine lot of prisoners you'll be able to take, won't you? You're in our power pretty tidy, I reckon, and I give you fair notice that if you don't obey our orders, we'll just blaze away into the middle of you, and do for you all. Lie down on the floor the whole kit of you! Don't let us have a bit of you left in sight above the window-sills.”

Most of the men huddled together within the narrow limits of the Llusern obeyed this command at once; but a few still hesitated and remained upright, amongst whom was

the baronet—too completely disconcerted and confused to have yet quite realised what was happening. This stiffneckedness made the enemy impatient.

“Lie down I tell you, you fools!” roared he, still more imperiously than before. “Do you think as I’m a-going to stop here all night saying the same thing over and over again? Or do you want for to be shot at?”

“No, no!” exclaimed some of those who had already lain down, and who began to be afraid lest the obstinacy of their comrades should draw down the poachers’ fire upon the Llusern to the general destruction. “Lie down all—we’re bound to do it.”

“No use our going agin ’em, sir,” said one of the keepers to his master. “The light ain’t good enough for a very fust-class aim, but still if they was to fire in here with we all in a heap together as



we be, why, they'd be sure to hit a lot of us permiskuous-like, and do a termenjious deal of harm. We'd best do as he says."

"Ay, ay! Don't make 'em fire—lie down all," repeated those on the ground anxiously.

This was the prevailing opinion. Evidently much bloodshed and no good would be the result of bringing upon the Llusern the fire of the numerous guns outside, and so those of the baronet's party, who had hitherto remained standing now prostrated themselves on the floor by their companions—though there was some difficulty in finding room for all in that narrow space. The baronet himself was the last to follow suit. He made an effort to protest; but the mingled feelings of indignation and dismay that struggled in his breast made him stammer worse than ever, and before he had got

beyond a preliminary “a—a—a—a—” his men drew him down without waiting to hear more, declaring that if he stood up any longer he and they would be all shot together. Even in such trying circumstances as these he instinctively endeavoured to preserve an attitude of as much dignity as might be possible. To lie absolutely flat on the floor was absurd, degrading, ridiculous, and so instead of lowering himself to that point he merely sat down, and kept his head and body carefully erect. But the foe outside would not tolerate this compromise.

“There’s half of one of you in sight still !” cried he angrily. “Go lower, I tell you, and keep right down if you don’t want to be shot ! We won’t have one bit of you showing above the windows.”

Sir Cadwallader was a tall man, and the

level of the window-sills was low. Looking disconsolately at them he groaned deeply, and again attempted to remonstrate and to set forth the impossibility of concealing himself as required. But his tormentor outside cut him short unfeelingly, and his own frightened followers urged on him the necessity of obedience, and he was obliged reluctantly to yield. He did all he could to avoid complete prostration, however. He leant first backwards, then on one side, and then on the other; but it was of no avail, for there was no means by which he could tuck himself thoroughly out of sight short of lying flat down—and this he at last had to do, though almost choking with mortification and rage at the indignity to which he was subjected.

“Ah, that’ll do now,” observed the man, who was acting as spokesman for the

poachers. "And now just you attend to wot I'm going for to say—you, Gough, and your fellows! There's chaps out here in plenty as has had their crops and gardens hurt by your old pheasants and hares and rabbits, and 'tis nothing but right for them as has had to suffer by the creeturs, to have a turn to get a bit of good out on 'em too—so we be going to have a bit of fun with the game ourselves to-night. But we don't choose to be interfered with at it neither, so meanwhile some on us means for to stay here and take care as all of you stops quiet. I daresay as we shall be some time amusing of ourselves; but that won't make no odds to you, for we sha'n't touch you so long as you doesn't move, and you can have a nice sleep lying there just as if you was in bed, you know. Only don't go to forget that if you was to rise high enough to show

above the window-sills you'll be shot for certain—and in case you may be doubting that we can aim enough to hit the house and you too, here's proof of it!"

He wound up by discharging his gun full at the Llusern; and as the recumbent party heard the shots whistle over their heads, and strike against the walls and woodwork, they realised vividly the imminent peril to which any one raised above the prescribed height would have been exposed. They were, however, far too much cowed to meditate resistance, and remained quite still according to the instructions they had received.

Very soon ensued noises which told that the poaching had begun and was going on fast and furiously. Voices were heard calling to one another from all parts of the wood, and also screams from hares and

rabbits *in extremis* ; and when the moon was fully up frequent shots announced that the pheasants roosting on the trees were being fired at, whilst the success of the shooters was made known by the crash and thud of the falling birds.

The aggravation caused by these sounds to the prisoners in the Llusern may easily be imagined, as the night wore on and brought no relief from the disagreeable and humiliating position in which they found themselves, cowering on the floor of the summer-house, cramped, cold, entrapped, jeered at, uncomfortable in both body and mind. And to add to their sufferings they had the consciousness that the troubles they were undergoing were not of a nature to enable them to look forward eventually to receive the consoling balm of pity and admiration ; but would, on the contrary

call forth nothing but laughter and contempt. Verily the bright moonlight that streamed into the Llusern that night had rarely shone upon a set of men in a more unenviable predicament! There were keepers listening passively to the triumph of their natural enemies the poachers—keepers hearing the game in their care which they had tended and reared and cherished for noble and paying sportsmen, being slaughtered by unlicensed guns from whom no tip would ever come, and yet not daring to make an effort to hinder such desecration. Then there were policemen remaining perforce inactive whilst the law and order whereof they were the constituted guardians was being openly broken and set at naught. And finally there was the owner, magistrate, legislator, senator, man of importance of the neighbourhood, present at these dis-

graceful proceedings with a strong force of his own men and constables to support him, and yet unable to lift a finger to enforce the laws of the land or protect his own property from spoliation. Poor Sir Pomponious! Well might sighs of inexpressible dejection burst forth from time to time from his troubled bosom as he bethought him of the brilliant dreams with which he had set out on this disastrous expedition, and wondered how it was possible for them to have turned so quickly into such disgusting realities!

During the night the outside guard was changed, and fresh men relieved those first posted there; but the vigilance of the watch was not for a moment relaxed, and any movement on the part of the prisoners was invariably met by a stern reminder to be quiet. And thus the long hours passed

on — spent in merry triumph and delight by the victorious evildoers, and in dreary wretchedness by the representatives of legitimate authority uncomfortably located on a hard, uneven floor from which they dared not rise.

One feeble ray of hope came to them once, and they believed they had discovered a method whereby they might even yet redeem their credit and be avenged for their injuries. It was when the cessation of shots and voices proved that the night's work was at last over ; and then it occurred to the prisoners that if they were at once to hurry after the retreating poachers they might overtake and capture some of them before they would have had time to hide or otherwise dispose of the game with which they were laden, and that thus the outraged majesty of law might still be vindicated.

But, alas ! the wary foe had foreseen this possibility, and had provided against it by continuing the guard round the Llusern long enough after the departure of the chief body of poachers to enable them to get off safely. And, therefore, when a couple of keepers, who thought the coast was clear, began raising themselves slowly from the floor, they were immediately greeted with a shout of, "What are you about there, men ? 'Tisn't time to be getting up yet—stop you a bit longer first !" which made them sink back to their former position.

It was some while after this before the prisoners made another attempt at sitting up, and by that time the poachers had all gradually dispersed in various directions, and were far enough away. Sir Cadwallader and his men felt at that moment neither spirits nor inclination to set out on a wild-goose

chase after foes who had had a good long start and might have gone east, west, north, or south ; so there was nothing for it but to slink home with their tails between their legs like conscience-stricken dogs. In melancholy sadness, therefore, the party departed from the Llusern and wended their way back to Castell Eithin, which they reached just as grey morning twilight was beginning to steal over the land. All were downcast and wretched—but more unutterably depressed and unhappy than any of the others was their leader, on whom, chiefly, would fall the scorn, mortification, and ignominy incurred by that night's failure. The Nasmyth hammer that was to have exterminated his enemies seemed to have lighted upon himself instead. He writhed mentally as he recollected the *Imperial Illuminator*, and thought of the spiteful

account of the adventure which it would inevitably contain—of the venomous pleasure it would take in his degradation—of how it would ridicule him past all power of being comforted by the friendly *County Chronicle*. Indeed, even so staunch a supporter as that paper—thoroughly prepared as it was to swallow him whole—would find it no easy matter to put a good face on such an absolute and disgraceful fiasco, as that which had just occurred.

It seemed doubtful for the moment whether the head that had grovelled for so many hours in the dust at the command of poachers would ever again manage to erect itself with quite the same pompous importance as of yore.





CHAPTER V.

MR FARREN HAS TO ENDURE A RUMPUS.



AT Hazel Hall, as well as at Castell Eithin, the tranquillity of the master of the house was being disturbed by the inconsiderate behaviour of the lower class. For Mr Farren had been subjected to considerable annoyance through the way in which his favourite butler, Richards, had persisted in thinking that he understood his own interest better than any one else could do, and that when a promise had been made him he had a right to be aggrieved if it were not kept.

It will be remembered that there was a farm of Mr Farren's at Grayford which Richards had set his heart upon taking. He had, after some difficulty, got his master to promise him the lease of this farm whenever it should be vacant, and when, soon afterwards, the vacancy occurred (through the death of the then tenant, Smith), Richards entertained no doubt of the farm passing straight into his hands. Relying confidently on Mr Farren's word, he regarded Grayford as being already as good as his own, and thought that he would be able to take possession of it as soon as another butler had been found to replace him at the hall.

This, however, was by no means Mr Farren's view of the matter. The promise of Grayford had only been given to Richards in order to prevent him from taking another farm which had pleased him, and

which had then been in the market, but Mr Farren had never seriously contemplated fulfilling the promise. He cordially detested the worry of having to look out for a fresh servant, and engage him and tell him what to do. As it was Mr Farren's idea that things ought to be done exactly in the way he liked, without his taking the trouble of giving any directions or saying when they were wrong, it naturally followed that he found a good deal of difficulty about getting servants to suit him, since a man could hardly be expected to know by intuition what all Mr Farren's peculiar little fads and fancies might be. But Richards having been unusually clever in divining and falling into his master's ways, had become essential to his comfort; so that Mr Farren regarded the prospect of losing such a treasure of a butler as a dire calamity,

which was by all means to be averted if possible. When the farm became vacant he knew well enough that Richards would be expecting it, and could not exactly make up his mind what to do.

Really it was very tiresome of old Smith not to have taken on a fresh spell of life, for as long as he lived Mr Farren was safe from the dilemma in which he now found himself! On the one hand he certainly had said that Richards should have the farm; and he had a suspicion that the man—though so excellent a servant—was nevertheless bad-tempered and hard to turn aside from anything he was resolved to have; Mr Farren feared that a such man was extremely likely to make more or less rumpus about being disappointed—and a rumpus was Mr Farren's particular aversion. But then on the other hand he did not

see how he could avoid the rumpus he disliked without making up his mind to lose Richards and get another servant in his place — and he did not think he would ever again meet with another butler to suit him so exactly.

On the whole the alternative seemed worse than the rumpus; and so he resolved that by hook or by crook he would get out of keeping his promise about Grayford. How this was to be effected he need not bother himself with settling yet. He would wait till the time came when he should be called upon to fulfil his word, and trust to some inspiration of Humbug coming to him then—that would be less trouble than inventing lies beforehand, and keeping them in his head till he wanted to use them. Besides there was always the chance that some other applicant for the farm might

come forward any day, and the whole matter be quietly settled before Richards should hear anything about it. Of course in that case Mr Farren need only pretend to have completely forgotten his first promise; he would not care how much vexation he professed at his own carelessness when it should be too late to be remedied.

Mr Farren's suspicion as to his butler's temper was perfectly correct—and indeed no one could look at the strange, gloomy expression of his sallow, square-jawed face, relieved by black, rough hair, and coal black eyes that flashed out when excited from under straight, bushy eyebrows, without coming to that conclusion about him. Sombre, morose, and unsociable at the best of times, he was easily roused to furious passion, and, when provoked, would sulk and chew the cud of his resentment for long

afterwards — nursing his wrath carefully, going back again and again to the cause of irritation, and lashing himself up to fresh fury each time that he thought of it. It was a curious trait in his character that, notwithstanding the many years he had knocked about in this world of humbug, and the number of times he had been imposed upon, he still preserved the simple readiness of a child to believe implicitly whatever was told him by one of his fellow-creatures with an appearance of good faith; therefore he was, of course, extremely easy to deceive. What made this credulity of his still more peculiar, was that nothing irritated him more than to discover that it had been taken advantage of, and that any one had duped him. Whenever this occurred it excited in him a strange, morbid, unhealthy condition of mind, which told upon the body also, and

grew continually worse as he went on brooding over the injury, and seeking for some means of punishing it. A vindictive hatred, that gathered strength every day, would take possession of him, and go on accumulating until he had succeeded in revenging himself; but when once that was done he immediately returned to his wonted self again—seeming by the act of vengeance to have cleared off some dangerous poison that had penetrated and overcharged his whole system. Retaliation on the deceiver became his first object in life whenever he had been deceived, and though he might have to wait long for the accomplishment of his purpose, yet he would stick to it pertinaciously without being changed or softened by lapse of time, and it was but seldom that any person who had taken him in had escaped without some kind of punishment in the end.

Though rarely letting himself get actually drunk, yet he was a great deal too fond of spirits—habitually drinking to the verge of what his head would stand, and pouring down liquor in sufficient quantity to inflame his naturally bad temper and make it far worse than it would otherwise have been. And as furthermore, he had an extraordinary trick when displeased of making most alarming and diabolical faces—“settin’ there in a chair and a-goin’ on at it for a quarter of an hour together,” as was once affirmed by the terrified cook—it was no wonder that he should have been very unpopular amongst his fellow-servants, who regarded him with a mixture of awe and dislike, and had as little as possible to do with him. They could far better understand and sympathise with a good, downright, explosion of temper that cursed and swore freely if need be, and

!

then soon made friends again, than with a slowly-simmering, long-abiding, unforgiving wrath like that of Richards.

It was some days after Smith's death before anything passed on the subject of the vacant farm between Mr Farren and his butler. The latter rather wondered at his master's not mentioning the matter, but he never dreamt of the disappointment in store for him, and concluded that as the affair had been definitely arranged between them already, it was a matter of course for things to go on as settled without any need for further words about it. Still he wished to find out how soon he would be able to take possession of his farm, so at last one morning after breakfast he went to Mr Farren's study, saying, "Could I speak to you for a moment, sir?" in that tone of indefinable stiffness and difference

from its wonted accents which at once conveys to the ear of the practised house-keeper that the subject to be brought under notice is somewhat out of the ordinary domestic routine.

Mr Farren immediately guessed what was coming, that he was going to be forced the point of openly refusing to keep to his word, and would have to endure the consequent rumpus. Still to put off the evil moment for even one day longer would be a gain—for there was no knowing what might happen in that time, and whether it might not bring him intelligence of some new applicant for the farm. Assuming, therefore, the worried look of a man whose head is full of an engrossing subject which requires the whole attention, and who grudges the least interruption of the important thoughts that occupy him, he



rose hastily from his chair and took up his cap as he replied, "Ah—do you want to speak to me at this particular minute, or won't it do as well when I come in? I'm busy just now. I was just going to show the gardener a new compost that I wish to try for the dahlias."

"Oh, certainly, sir; there's no particular hurry. It'll do equally as well when you come in," returned the unsuspecting Richards, and withdrew to his own regions of plate-powder and paraffin oil, whilst his master bustled out of the house and took very good care to give the man no second opportunity of private conversation during that day. The twenty-four hours, however, produced no prospect of any other tenant. And as a gentleman cannot avoid his butler who lives in the house with him and knows what he is about, by the variety of pretexts

which may avail to ward off any outside individual whom it is desirable to keep at a distance, therefore the interview became inevitable on the following morning.

“You see, sir,” began Richards, “as, of course, I shouldn’t wish for to ill-convenience you in any way by leaving before you’re suited with some one else. Still I’m naturally wishful to take my farm in hand as soon as possible, and should be glad to have some idea as to when you will be able to spare me.”

Mr Farren affected to be quite puzzled.

“Eh?” said he. “I don’t understand what you’re talking about.”

Richards was surprised at this forgetfulness, and felt somewhat nettled that a matter of such great importance and interest to himself should have been so little considered by his master.

"I was speaking about Grayford farm, sir," he replied ; "the one as was old Smith's."

"But bless my soul !" returned Mr Farren, "what in the world has that got to do with you ? I don't know what you're driving at."

The Grayford farm question had been discussed by the two men too recently for such entire forgetfulness to be quite natural. Richards began to take offence and grow warm.

"You said as how I should have the farm whenever it comed vacant," said he ; "and now as it is vacant, why, in course, I looks to have it according to your own words, sir ; that's all as I'm driving at—and not so very hard to see either, I should think."

Mr Farren wrinkled his forehead and screwed up his eyes as though making a



desperate effort to recall to mind the thing, which he remembered perfectly all the while.

“Let me see,” said he reflectively; “now you speak of it I think I *do* recollect your having said something about liking to take Grayford if it were vacant. But my promising it you is quite another matter; no doubt you misunderstood me in some way.”

“Quite impossible,” answered the butler positively. “It was just the other day like, when I was looking at that farm of the duke’s, which I should have taken only for your telling me as plain as words could speak, as I should have Grayford if I liked when it fell in. And Smith being so ill as he was, I thought I shouldn’t lose many crops waiting for the vacancy. Don’t you recollect of me saying so, sir?”

Instead of answering the question, Mr Farren tried a fresh tack.

"Farming's an awfully bad business now-a-days, you know," said he. "It's about the worst investment of capital a man can possibly make, and you'd be a deal wiser to keep clear of it. What with bad seasons and American competition there aren't many farmers manage to keep their heads above water at all—let alone making their land pay."

"You told me all that when I spoke to you about it at first," returned Richards doggedly; "and my answer was as I wasn't afraid to take my chance. And then you said since I was so set upon it you supposed I must have my own way, and you would let me take Grayford when it came vacant. *I* remember it all well enough if *you* don't."

Mr Farren thought he would try whether an affectation of unusual personal interest

would do anything towards conciliating Richards' obdurate nature, and getting him to change his mind.

"You must know very well, my good fellow," said he, "that I take far too real an interest in your welfare to see you do an imprudent thing without trying to stop you. A man needs a deal of experience to give him a chance of succeeding as a farmer, and it doesn't at all follow that because you're an excellent butler, therefore you'll make any hand at farming. Cleaning plate won't teach you anything about cleaning land, any more than knowing how to lay a table would help you to lay an egg—ha, ha, ha!" and as he laughed at the little joke, he looked to see if Richards appeared at all softened at the honour conferred on him by his master's condescending to say funny things for his sole benefit.

The butler's face, however, did not relax into a smile, and betrayed no appreciation of either the honour or the joke.

“Seeing what a short time back it was as we was talking of this before, and you trying to choke me off with just the same sort of reasons,” replied he angrily, “it certainly does seem remarkable odd for you to have forgotten all about it! But since your memory is so short, I’ll tell you again what I told you then. And that is that a farm is what I was born and bred upon, and what I’ve long made up my mind to settle upon so soon as I should find one to suit me ; which, through being hard to please, was not till the other day when that one of the duke’s was open — either that or Grayford seemed made a purpose for me, I thought. I could have had the duke’s, but gave it up through your promising me Grayford—

and now I expects of you to make your words good, sir! You know quite well that I'm saying nothing but the truth, and you can't go against it neither!"

Richards was becoming excited; and as his ire rose, so also did his voice. Mr Farren hated loud voices, and began to feel that the rumpus he had dreaded was undoubtedly come upon him. It upset him, and bored him, and was thoroughly distasteful to him; but yet it was certainly the minor of the two evils between which he had to choose, for the present *mauvais quart d'heure* would soon be over, and then there would be an end of the matter, whereas giving way would involve a much longer period of discomfort—what with hunting for a servant first and then getting accustomed to him afterwards. Mr Farren's only response to the last speech was to shake his

head gently with a bland, unconvinced smile, which added fresh fuel to the butler's wrath.

At this moment Mrs Farren came into the room, and to her Richards turned abruptly, exclaiming,—

“Did you chance to hear any talk a little bit ago, mum, from master or any one else about me going to have Grayford Farm?”

The suddenness of the question, and the loud angry tones she had heard from outside, so flustered the poor lady that she quite forgot the subject to be one as to which shortness of memory might perhaps be expedient.

“Dear me!” cried she, without noticing her husband's warning look; “did I ever hear about it, did you say? Yes, to be sure! Your master was talking to me of it—let me see—when can it have been?” Here she caught sight of Mr Farren's face, and stopped short in confusion—not quite

making out what he wanted of her, but fearing she had remembered too much. Richards, meanwhile, had got the confirmation he hoped for, and was so far triumphant.

“There!” cried he; “you see what she says—*she* knew I was to have the farm, for you told her so yourself! You’re bound to recollect about it. And in course a gentleman like you won’t go to break his word to a poor man like me—no more than if he’d took a solemn Bible oath to it. ’Tisn’t likely!”

Likely or not, it was just the very thing that Mr Farren intended doing. The presence of a third person on whom he could vent his annoyance without fear of consequences was a relief to him at that moment, so he snubbed his wife sharply for interrupting him when he was busy, and for talking

of what she did not understand, and sent her out of the room in a state of almost tearful trepidation—nervously conscious that things were going wrong, and that she had somehow helped them on in that undesirable direction, and yet quite in the dark as to how she had contrived to do it.

Mr Farren thought it was time to bring the interview to an end. It seemed to him he had put up with as much unpleasantness as could be expected, and that he must now be entitled to get out of having any more. "I am sure," said he soothingly, "that no one can be more sorry than I am that this should have occurred; but it is evident that there has been a great misunderstanding—"

"No misunderstanding at all!" interrupted Richards. "'Twas all as plain as could be between us."

“Excuse me,” continued Mr Farren, “I feel quite certain you either heard me wrong, or else made some other mistake about what I said. I never dreamt of letting a farm of mine to any but an experienced farmer—and that you know you are not. Besides, I am now in treaty with some one else who wishes to take it, and to whom I have almost promised it.”

“Promised it to another man than me?” exclaimed Richards, indignantly.

“So I have told you,” replied his master, calmly repeating the first lie that came handy. “But whoever has it, it is better that you should not. You would only ruin yourself with it, and then I should always feel that the ruin of a man for whom I have a great regard was lying at my door. I must refuse your request for my own sake as well as yours.”

The butler's passion was rising to an almost uncontrollable pitch, and was not one whit diminished by his employer's affectation of extreme consideration and good feeling towards him; yet it was characteristic of the man that, in spite of the experience of Mr Farren's dishonesty which he was at that moment receiving, it never entered his head to doubt the entire truth of the assertion that there was another tenant in treaty for the farm; which assertion he accepted unhesitatingly as an established matter of fact that needed no further proof. Advancing a step nearer to his master, he exclaimed, almost menacingly,—

“I don't believe as you cares one rap whether I'm ruined or not! As I told you before I'm quite ready to take my chance of what may come to me, and not go laying the blame of it at your door nor any one's

else's neither! You made me a positive, plain promise, and I say as you haven't the right now to take it back and give it to some one else. I trusted to the word you gave me—do you mean to keep to it or not?"

Mr Farren rose from his seat and drew himself up with an air of dignity and conscious rectitude, which ought by rights to be the exclusive property of those who have truth and honesty on their side, but which, unluckily, the humbugs and liars are often able to assume as readily as any one else.

"You are forgetting yourself I think," said he quietly, pointing to the door, "and had better leave the room before you say anything you may afterwards be sorry for. You have had my answer, and I wish to hear no more about the matter."

"But you *must* hear more of it!" cried

Richards furiously, and half raising his hand as he spoke. "Do you suppose as a man is to be cheated like that, and then say nothing except, perhaps, thank ye kindly for making a fool of me?"

"Be silent, Richards, and leave the room at once as I told you," said Mr Farren coldly.

For a moment the butler hesitated. His face worked convulsively with the stormy passion that agitated him, and he stood in a threatening attitude with his right fist clenched and slightly raised. His master, on the contrary, appeared perfectly composed, and manifested only that sort of contemptuous indifference to any outward demonstration of violence from an inferior, which is generally acquired by those who have been accustomed from childhood to give orders and have them obeyed. This

demeanour took effect upon Richards in spite of his rage, and gave him a feeling of insignificance, and of being impotent against one whose impassibility was in such striking contrast with his own turbulence. He could not divest himself, either, of the instinctive inclination to obey resulting from long custom; and so altogether the ascendancy of race dominated him and checked the violent impulse that had well-nigh got the upper hand. His lifted hand sank back to his side, and with an ugly scowl he turned and left the room, muttering as he gained the passage outside,—

“How dare he promise my farm to another fellow? But as sure as I’m a living man I won’t be made a fool of for nothing! He needn’t think he’s heard the last of it yet. I’ll have another try for Grayford still, and if he don’t stick to his word it’ll

be the worse for him in the end. I'm not such a dolt but what I'll find some way of paying out a cheat!"

"What an awful nuisance a rumpus is!" thought Mr Farren, throwing himself back in his chair wearily. "I really don't see how I could have helped it, though, for promising him Grayford was my only resource to stop him taking that other farm he was after. It's all the fault of his being so completely selfish, and so set upon having just what pleases him without the least consideration for any one else. What a deuce and all of a temper the fellow has too! I always thought it wasn't over and above good, but I'd no idea he'd have gone so far and made such a scene. 'Pon my soul I half thought he'd have hit me once! If he wasn't such an excellent servant, and didn't suit me so thoroughly, I wouldn't

have stood his nonsense for a minute. I daresay he'll be considerably ashamed of himself by-and-by, when he's had time to cool down and recover his temper. Servants certainly are a frightful worry when they forget their proper place in creation, and insist upon having likes and dislikes, whims, fancies, and ideas, just like their betters. One's dependent on them for such lots of things that one couldn't exist without them, and so they are necessary evils; but I do think life might be made a deal more comfortable if some one would invent a machine to do every thing one wants done, and enable one to dispense with them altogether! Ah, well! I'm glad that business is satisfactorily finished. Now I must go and see whether there's enough bass matting to cover the new lot of Veronicas I had down last night.'

And with that Mr Farren dismissed the disagreeable subject from his thoughts, and went off to fuss happily over his beloved garden.

Richards, meanwhile, sat swelling in the pantry, helping himself freely to his master's brandy, and going over and over again in his mind what had just taken place. He had been tricked, laughed at, lied to, wronged, and made a fool of. He felt as though there were a demon beside him dinning these words into his ears with a wearisome iteration that almost drove him mad, and he could think of nothing else. His resentment grew and deepened in intensity till it became like an acute pain gnawing at his heart and causing a hardly endurable aching. The spirits that he poured down his throat kept adding fresh fuel to the fire, and the demon that haunted him was only to be soothed by thoughts of vengeance.



CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER FROM EDITH.

NE morning not long after Edith had concluded her visit at Castell Eithin and returned home, Chloe, whose letters were always brought her in her bedroom, received the following epistle :—

“DEAREST AND BEST OF CHLOES,—I *have* got such a piece of news for you ! You'll think me quite too ridiculously silly when you know what it is — but you mustn't be very hard upon me, for you must remember that it's not every one who can attain that

pitch of serene indifference whence you contemplate the ordinary lot of humanity. I'm going to be married. That's enough to make you begin turning up your nose at me at once — isn't it now? But, oh dear! how much higher it will go, and how many degrees more shall I sink in your estimation when I tell you that the gentleman is Mr Roger Lloyd? I'm afraid you'll disapprove of the match awfully, for I know how you've always looked down on him, and laughed at him as a baby — and I'm sure you're much cleverer than me too, and more likely to be right about people. Still, I'm going to brave your disapprobation, you see; so do try and reconcile yourself to your cousin that is to be, and don't condemn your cousin that is as an utter fool, if you can help it. He is so kind, and such a thorough gentleman, that I expect to get on capitally,

and be very happy indeed with him. Even if he is a little wee bit stupid, it won't matter to me anything like as much as it would to a creature as clever and hard to please as you are. I do think I'm in wonderful luck. Why, he might have had almost any one he chose to ask, I suppose. Papa and mamma are quite too awfully pleased—and so am I; they never dreamt of my making such a first-rate match—and no more did I, either. What a swell I shall be! I can hardly realise its being true yet. Somehow you seem much more naturally fit for the grand position than me—though, of course, that must seem rubbish to you who never could tolerate poor Roger at all, and always have thought him inferior to every one else. Well, no doubt your time will come some day, Miss Chloe; I sometimes wonder how brilliant a match will be re-

quired before you will descend from that lofty pinnacle of superiority on which you like to perch yourself, and thence descant scornfully upon love and matrimony as abstract matters with which you have nothing whatever to do! But now I must stop chaffing, and come to business, you dear old thing! Of course you'll be my head bridesmaid, for none of the rest will be half so much friends of mine as you've always been; and I want you to settle whether they shall have veils, or bonnets, or hats. And what materials and colours do you advise for the dresses? It's no use thinking of consulting *all* the bridesmaids, for it's impossible to please every one, so I just mean you to say what *you* like best, and then the others will have to do as they are told. I know I can trust to your taste quite safely.

“I mean to have everything smart at the

wedding—I'm sure it'll be only a proper compliment to Roger. I sha'n't allow the bridesmaids to wear home-manufactured dresses, nor yet to have them made at different places. Which dressmaker do you think had better have the order? I'm half inclined for Elise myself. And then there's another thing as to which you may as well let me know your views. Mamma was saying that such a rich man as Roger is almost sure to give something very handsome as bridesmaids' presents, and as he's very likely to ask my advice about it, if you'll tell me what sort of thing would suit you best—whether locket, bracelet, ring, necklace or what—I'll advise him accordingly. So now write and tell me what you think on these various points. I shall be guided by you entirely, remember. And I hope you'll manage to congratulate me nicely—you ought to do it with quite a clear conscience (how-

ever low your opinion of poor Roger may be), when you think what a position I shall have. How funny that I should actually be going to be a countess some day. No time for more now from your devoted. EDITH."

Chloe put down the letter in her lap and began to reflect upon it with a strange, unaccountable feeling of pain.

So it was all settled and done then, and *she* needn't think any more of marrying Roger, at all events. And at that instant there came suddenly to her like a flash of lightning the horrible conviction that she herself cared for him—that it was the very man himself that had had an attraction for her, and not merely his worldly advantages. She had not known it before—had never suspected such a thing. But the pain caused by hearing of his engagement to some one

else had roughly torn asunder the veil that had hitherto concealed from her her own condition, and disclosed to her the terrible fact that she was actually and indeed in love, and—worse than all—in love with a man who cared not one jot for her, and who never had done so.

She felt absolutely overwhelmed. Not being of a tearful nature, she did not want to burst into tears, but she was conscious of an impulse prompting her to groan aloud and bury her face in her hands, so that even the daylight itself might not behold her in the first moments of shame at this startling and humiliating self-revelation. It would have afforded her some kind of relief, though of course it could have done no real good. But even that poor satisfaction was impossible just then with her maid in attendance to be astonished at, and make comments on any

such erratic proceedings. So Chloe's hair-dressing progressed as usual while she sat outwardly cold and rigid in front of the looking-glass, and gave no sign of the commotion of thoughts and feelings that was stirred up within by this terrible thing that had come upon her.

She loved him. Yes—she had discovered that at the moment of finding him irretrievably gone out of her reach—gone so that she would have no more chance of him. She wondered whether Alice had been right in maintaining that there had once been a time when she, Chloe, need only have put out her hand to secure him. Ah! if so, how *could* she have been so blind and foolish as to let the possible happiness slip from her and thus spoil her life. She would have to regret it to the end of her days, since she must henceforth make up her mind to a hopelessly marred

existence — to one that would be deficient always in the domestic felicity that falls to the lot of the generality of women. For to suppose that there could be in the whole world another such man as him—another with whom it would ever be possible for her to fall in love, was quite absurd ; of that she felt perfectly convinced.

How *could* she have made such a fool of herself as to let herself get to care like this for any man ? How ? Why, because he was worthy of it, to be sure—well worthy of it ! She need, at all events, not reproach herself with having been fascinated by one who was mean, petty, ignoble, false, or in any way unworthy and inferior ! Had she not watched him closely and learnt what he really was—how different to other men and superior to them—how much more honest, manly, straightforward, and excellent in every respect ? And

the thought of all the goodness and good qualities that she believed herself to have discerned in him, made her, for the moment, almost proud of the affection that she esteemed so dire a disgrace.

She took up the letter again, and began re-reading and criticising it. How could Edith speak of him as "stupid," indeed! Hadn't she wits enough to recognise what an immense difference there is between stupidity and the modesty which had often kept back Roger from obtruding his opinions in any discussion where he was not appealed to, and no question of right and wrong involved. Was not that modest reserve of his a most unusual and graceful feature in a young man like him who could—had he been so minded—by merely holding up a finger have surrounded himself with legions of toadies and flatterers to agree with whatever he chose to say, and foster his

conceit? Really, Edith ought to have more sense than that.

The leading ideas of the letter seemed to be about clothes, and what a swell the writer was going to be, and what a brilliant marriage she was about to make. How strange that the fortunate girl who was engaged to such a man as him should look upon matters like these as chief topics of interest and congratulation.

“So kind and such a gentleman—” fancy summing up his merits in such an inadequate way as that!

And how ridiculously foolish of Edith to be so confident that Chloe disliked and looked down upon him—the mistake seemed at first almost ludicrous to the latter, as she saw it by the light of the discovery about herself that she had just made. Yet, when she came to think of her past conduct she felt constrained to admit that she had no right

to complain of her cousin's error after all. She had all along been acting a part in respect of Roger, and it was now evident that the performance had been sufficiently good to deceive even one of her greatest friends. What an aptitude for humbug she must possess then! And then suddenly it struck her that humbug had been the chief cause of her present troubles! For—to go back to the very beginning of her acquaintance with Roger—had she not been willing in her own mind to undertake to love, honour, and obey before she had ever seen or known anything about him, except that he was rich and a great catch? And what more arrant piece of humbug than that could a girl contemplate? From that first seed the corresponding crop had quickly sprung up. Fierce self-condemnation for the meanness of her secret intention had made her shrink so



nervously from having it suspected as to make her always affected and constrained in her behaviour to him. Besides, when once she had made up her mind to do that for which she despised herself, she had got to feel certain that it was absolutely impossible for her ever to grow to care about him honestly in such a way as to justify her intention of marrying him. The more reason there was for desiring such a frame of mind, the more hopelessly unattainable did it appear. Thus she had never been natural and sincere in her actions towards him ; and her thoughts also in connection with him had been so perverted and distorted that she had humbugged herself to the point of not being able to discover the deep impression he was making upon her heart all the time. Ah, well ! there was no use crying over spilt milk—but what would she not give to have

over again the last few months in order to let humbug alone and be true to the more honest nature within her that had always condemned it! Then she would now surely have had nothing to be ashamed of, and would not feel that she had derogated from her favourite motto, *sans peur et sans reproche*.

From this digression her thoughts again returned to the letter. Somehow it was unsatisfactory—there was something jarring and provoking to her about it, and she began trying to make out what this was. Gradually came a vague suspicion that it was not such a letter as a girl in love with him would have written—that it was the letter of one who thought only of his money and rank, who did not care for him as he deserved, could not appreciate the value of the treasure that had come to her, was not half

good enough for him. But this involved attributing unworthiness to Edith, who was her especial friend; and as soon as Chloe perceived that her thoughts were carrying her towards this conclusion she checked them with indignant disgust lest she should be drawn to offend against the sacred laws of friendship—whereof she had a youthfully high-minded and chivalrous ideal. According to her code it was as treacherous and disloyal to harbour within the deepest recesses of the heart ill-natured or disparaging thoughts of a friend, as to proclaim them openly to all the world. She deemed treason in thought as abhorrent and little to be tolerated as treason in deed, and held that a friend worthy of the name would be as staunch and loyal in private as public.

Her toilette having been by this time completed, it was necessary to go downstairs

amongst other people and face them as usual—to announce the news she had just received—to listen to the various comments thereon, and take part in them as composedly as though the event had nothing to do with her, and had not wrought the downfall of the one great possibility of bliss which she had just discovered life to have contained for her! She felt it would be cruelly hard to keep up appearances and disguise her misery like this; but then she felt also that she had no option in the matter, for if she were to shut herself up in solitude, or become silent and melancholy, or indulge in any outward signs of grief, people would begin to suspect there was something wrong, and might be not unlikely to guess her secret. That would be still more unendurable. Though she could never undo the disgraceful folly she had committed in falling

in love with a man profoundly indifferent to her; yet at least she could strain every nerve to prevent any one else from finding it out, and to that end must forego the luxury of following her own inclinations.

A sorely tormented and burdened heart throbbed beneath her fresh and elegant costume that morning as she descended the stairs; and it needed the whole effort of her will to force herself into the usual outward grove. She could see only what a terrible muddle she had managed to make of her life, and how great the contrast was between the wretched prospect lying before her, and the enviable and rose-coloured lot awaiting Edith—and the thought of these things made her set her teeth and feel more inclined to dash her head against the wall, or rush off to the wildest and most solitary spot that could be found, than to put on

company manners and mingle with her fellow-creatures as she was about to compel herself to do. Had she learnt the rule that all work, other than what is purely mechanical, is valuable in proportion to the effort it costs, she would have perceived that the harder she had to struggle to control herself, so much the greater would be the consequent gain to her character. But she did not know this; and even if she had done so it may be doubted whether a girl of her age would have found the prospect of so remote an advantage efficacious in making the burden of immediate distress press less heavily on her.

There are two methods by which an idea may be given of what a person is like. Either the person may be described from outside, as it were, and spoken of as being

good, bad, proud, gentle, insincere, etc., etc. ; or else the character may be presented from the interior by showing the workings of the mind and the thoughts that pass over it, and then leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions therefrom. And as the second of these two methods appeared best adapted to give an accurate insight into Chloe's disposition, it has been necessary to represent her reflections at greater length than would otherwise have been done, both in this and one or two other chapters of her history.





CHAPTER VII.

BREAKFAST TALK AT CASTELL EITHIN.



SHOOTING party was assembled at Castell Eithin at the time of Chloe's receiving the news of Edith's engagement; and as she was rather late in coming down on that morning, all the rest of the party were already in the dining-room and hard at work at breakfast before she made her appearance. Some one had started the question of whether it was best to poach eggs or fry them, and an animated discussion was going on on this point to the intense discomfort of the master

of the house, who detested from the bottom of his soul whatever reminded him of the disastrous night in the Llusern, and whose ears tingled every time the word poaching was pronounced.

When first the question was raised he thought that his guests had hit upon a remarkably stupid subject to talk about ; that it was far too trivial to be worth expatiating on ; that it sounded greedy to talk of nothing but food ; that people were very dull not to interest themselves in something more intellectual. He fidgeted from side to side in his chair, and after one or two fruitless attempts to turn the conversation into some other channel, plunged into the newspaper with an ostentatious rustling and crackling which was meant to express his entire contempt for the topic then engrossing the rest of the party, and pretended to

be absorbed in the telegrams. But though his eyes were fixed upon the paper, he heard every word that was said, and as he listened there suddenly occurred to him a most disturbing idea.

Was it possible that the subject of discussion could have been chosen maliciously, and with the express purpose of teasing him, poking fun at him, and making a butt of him? Heavens and earth what an intolerable notion! Yet were there not grounds for this supposition? One of the disputants had appealed to him to say whether or not good poachers were common; what might not have been the meaning of that? And one of the ladies had declared that she always had the courage of her opinions, and wasn't afraid to say that she was all for poaching, however little favour such a sentiment might find in some people's eyes. Was

not that suspiciously like a covert allusion to his recent misfortune? And if the speakers were indeed behaving in this horrible manner, and aiming puns and sneers at him in all they said, what was the proper and most dignified course for him to pursue? If he took no notice of the insult and pretended not to see it, his friends would probably consider him densely stupid. Yet if he were to take offence at what was going on and resent it, and if, after all, no harm had been meant, he would be thought ridiculously touchy, and would be only drawing needless attention to an occurrence which was extremely unpleasant, and letting every one see how absurdly sensitive he was in regard to it. In either case he would lay himself open to be laughed at, and he could not at all decide upon what to do for the best.

If only he could be certain that he was

deliberately being made fun of, how angry he should be! He would soon find some way to make the jokers repent of their impertinence, and show them that it was no light matter to provoke the wrath of such a man as him! But then, on the other hand, to fly into a temper about nothing, was a sure way of becoming ludicrous. Yet it was dreadful to sit there fancying that he might perhaps be furnishing materials for a good story to be retailed in other houses, and do nothing to hinder it. In imagination he could hear his friends (!) relating, "The capital joke we had the other day with Cadwallader Gough after he'd got into that mess with the poachers, you know. Well, one morning at breakfast, etc."

The mere idea of such a thing made him shudder, and he sat upon thorns staring hard at the newspaper without understanding

a word that he looked at, and wishing to goodness that people would talk about anything rather than the cooking of eggs.

Chloe's arrival at this juncture brought relief to her brother-in-law, as the news of Edith's engagement at once threw all other topics of conversation into the shade, and every one set to work to discuss the young couple and their prospects with the freedom which usually distinguishes the remarks made upon people in those circumstances. For the announcement of an approaching marriage seems invariably to evoke some such sentiment as this: "Oh! we can say what we please about that pair now, since *we* are not likely ever to be bound up with them in any way, or to have them as connections of our own." And then all tongues are immediately set wagging with less restraint than before, and the

dispositions, peculiarities, abilities, properties, and general circumstances of the happy couple are spoken of with the utmost freedom as a matter of course.

“What! Roger Lloyd caught already?” exclaimed Lady Jane Dorville. “By Jove, I didn’t think he’d have gone under so quickly! Does any one know if it was a long hunt or not? And whether it ended in a kill single handed in the open, or in a drive by the mother or relations? And who’s Edith Farren? Hang me if I remember hearing the name before?”

This speech drew out Chloe, who felt bound in honour to endeavour to guard her friend from the accusation of being mercenary as jealously as she would herself. She knew the world at large was certain to say that Roger had been run after, trapped, and caught—and that she could not help; but at all events

no such statements must be permitted to pass unchallenged in her hearing.

“I suppose you don’t know that Edith Farren is our cousin, Lady Jane?” said she, rather stiffly. “She is a particular friend of mine besides, and knowing her as well as I do I feel convinced that her engagement has not been the result of a hunt, as you call it. Nor do I see how her father or mother can have had much hand in the matter either, considering that they had never set eyes on Mr Lloyd till just the other day, when he went into their neighbourhood of himself, and made acquaintance with them.”

Lady Jane whistled.

“Do you mean to say then, Chloe,” said she, “that you believe it to be a downright, old-fashioned, mutual-attraction, genuine love affair?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Chloe, relaxing her

stiffness and trying to speak as much as possible in her usual manner. "Don't you think I ought to feel quite proud of having such a romantic and uncommon first cousin? I wonder you don't remember Edith, though; she was staying with us in London for some time towards the end of the season, and you must have seen her about with us often, I should think."

"Was *that* the future Mrs Lloyd?" said Lady Jane. "Oh yes, then I do remember her. Somehow, whenever I met her she always gave me so much the idea of being the shadow of whoever she was with, rather than of possessing any separate existence of her own worth mentioning, that I forgot to associate such a mark of individuality as a name with her. Why, I used to fancy she was *your* shadow *par excellence*, Chloe—indeed I think there's a good deal of likeness between you."

Mr Scriven was also of the party, and thought this an excellent opportunity for proceeding with his investigations into what the relations had been between Roger and Chloe. "Then if Lloyd may be regarded as a high and discursive intellect," said he, "Lord Bacon gives us the key which fully explains this engagement."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Jane.

"Why," he replied, "Bacon says that it is the vice of such intellects to attach too much importance to slight resemblances; and that when this propensity is indulged to excess, it leads men to catch at shadows instead of substances. Does not the likeness you speak of, therefore, make it seem probable that Lloyd may have been misled in this way, and have mistaken the shadow for the substance?" and as he paid Chloe this compliment he turned and bowed politely to her,

looking sharply into her face meanwhile to see if the apparently random shot had gone home.

All this seemed to Chloe to be casting a sort of slur upon Edith by imputing inferiority to her, and she felt that loyalty to her friend demanded an immediate refutation of the charge ; so she answered bravely—though finding it a hard matter to steady her voice and countenance,—

“ Edith wasn’t my shadow or any one else’s. Of course when people are friends and a good deal together, they are likely to catch something of each other’s ways and manners ; but if the outside public sees no difference between that and being a shadow, I can’t say much for its discrimination—that’s all ! ”

If the conversation would have turned upon shadows, or anything in the world except a topic wherein Roger Lloyd was concerned, it

would have been a relief to Chloe, as every mention of his name gave her a pang, and made her wound smart afresh. But the engagement was too interesting to be dismissed so quickly, and Alice now chimed in also.

“Did I really hear you say, Lady Jane,” cried she, “that you haven’t made acquaintance with our cousin Edith? If so, I can assure you that you don’t know one of the very best and dearest girls in the whole world—one *quite* out of the common run, and enchanting in *every* way! There is a charm about her that I’ve always thought *too* wonderful! And I take a special interest in this news about her, because she was in my care when first she met the gentleman. You know how it always gratifies a chaperone to have her charges turn out well and do her credit! *Dearest* Edith! What an in-

effably delicious little countess she'll make when the time comes."

In past days Alice's opinions about Edith had been couched in considerably less enthusiastic terms than the foregoing. But then it was impossible that so devoted a worshipper of success as Lady Gough should fail to feel a surprising increase of esteem and affection for whoever of her friends might achieve social distinction. She entertained for society much the same reverence that a Catholic has for the Church—regarding it as an infallible body which can do no wrong. And as a Churchman holds the saints in especial respect, and does not dream of presuming to set up an opinion of his own about them contrary to that of the Church; so did Alice feel that she was in the same way bound to honour and speak highly of all those who received the approbation of that society in

whose judgment she believed, and to accept their merits as an unquestioned fact. The present sudden and marked alteration in her way of speaking about Edith by no means contributed to Chloe's peace of mind, as the reminder of how greatly her sister's affection was influenced by social success brought back the former detestable thought, that if she were to fail of such success, then possibly Alice might care less about her in consequence.

"Wonder 'f she'll comb Lloyd's hair fr him?" remarked Walter Mixon, dropping his words out over the edge of his shirt-collar for whoever chose to pick them up as usual. "Sh'd think he'd be easy f'llow t' manage."

"Well, I don't know that you're right there, Studs," returned Lady Jane. "He *seems* quiet enough, no doubt; but then a quiet seeming chap like him will sometimes

have the deuce and all of a temper, as I've had cause to know before now."

Here Sir Henry Dorville looked up re-monstratingly from a dish of hot buttered scones which had hitherto occupied his entire attention.

"Now, my dear Jane," protested he, "do be careful what you say! You'll be taking away my character if you don't mind; for every one knows what a quiet fellow I am, and always have been, and then when they hear you talking like that about quiet men they'll think you must have picked up your experience from me, and that I am a frightful bully in private! You must allow that would be rather rough on poor me, who am invariably the very meekest of lambs, and never in my life tried to interfere with you."

"Ah, but Roger Lloyd's quietness is quite

another pair of shoes from yours," replied his wife laughing; "I rather think he's *really* what I call quiet; but you aren't quiet at all except in a sort of spurious fashion, because you're too indolent to do your noisiness for yourself. You like it well enough and can't get on without it, only you want some one else to do it for you—like the Chinese with their little machines that go twirling round in the wind, and saying their prayers for them! You won't take the trouble of expressing your natural uproariousness in your own proper person, but you want surroundings that will do it for you, and supply you with voice and words as Aaron did to Moses. That's why you married me; and why you love dogs and horses and guns and anything that'll kick up no end of a shindy all around you."

Sir Henry had by this time done with the scones and turned lazily to Chloe.

"Now, Miss Arguelle," said he, "don't you think my wife is quite mistaken about me? I ask you for your candid opinion as to whether I'm not every bit as quiet as Roger Lloyd—and a deal more so too, very likely."

Why couldn't the man let her alone, and ask his stupid question of some one else? thought Chole, who felt she was being persecuted to the verge of endurance. She could not shirk answering, however, as both Sir Henry and Lady Jane were waiting for what she would say, so she replied,—

"I'm afraid I can't quite agree with you, Sir Henry, for this reason. A whole must certainly have a good deal the same nature as its better half, and as I don't know very much of you personally, I am obliged to form **my**

opinion about you from what I know of Lady Jane, who would not, I am sure, thank me for pronouncing her more quiet than Mr Lloyd." The last two words cost her an effort to get out, but she managed it with only a barely perceptible hesitation before them.

"Well done!" said Lady Jane, clapping her hands, "I should certainly think it a precious bad compliment to be told I was such a muff as Roger Lloyd—for that's what he is, you take my word for it, and it's because he's such a muff that he's so quiet. I don't believe he'd have gone down with any woman if he hadn't been so richly lined, for our sex isn't partial to muffs as a rule, is it Chloe? Not the style of thing would ever have suited *you*, eh?"

To Chloe's mind the conversation was becoming more and more insupportable.

Muff, indeed! Much any one knew about the matter who could apply the term to Roger! He had been man enough to captivate *her*, at all events, and she was burning to flare up in his defence and fling back the untrue accusation in the teeth of whoever dared to make it. But that, alas! was impossible. To break lances on his behalf was not her privilege, but Edith's, and she must listen quietly while her paladin was spoken of slightingly, and give no sign of the emotions that were agitating her.

"Oh, don't you think a muff would be the very thing for me, then?" said she with assumed gaiety. "I must say I quite differ from you there, for I long ago came to the conclusion that a muff would be a model husband because he'd give so little trouble, and that whenever I thought of turning into a married woman I should consider

looking out for the very mufiest man possible as the first necessary step towards it."

Walter Mixon made a face of exaggerated surprise at this speech.

"Pity th' muff you take for th' experiment," he remarked. "Know what'll happen to th' poor fellah. Gunpowder in 's cigars, coffee pot thrown at 's head ev'ry mornin', and little s'prises 'f that sort t' put life in him. Wouldn't stand in 's shoes for somethin'."

"Do you mean to say then that I shouldn't be able to get *you* for the place if I wanted to?" exclaimed Chloe, feigning intense disappointment. "Oh dear, oh dear, what a desperately unkind blow, Walter! I had made sure that in you I should always have a safe resource to fall back upon if the worst came to the worst, and the rest of mankind should fail to afford me an article sufficiently mufish to suit my requirements."

Here the end of breakfast stopped further chaff, and every one prepared to leave the dining-room.

“What time do we begin shooting to-day?” inquired Lady Jane, as she rose from the table.

“Half-past eleven, sharp,” replied her husband; “and it’s long past ten now.”

“The deuce it is!” exclaimed Lady Jane. “I’d no notion it was so late. I’m off to the terrace for my morning weed before I get into my shooting togs. Will you, Henry or Studs, or somebody, see that my belt is filled with cartridges for me?”

“All right—I’ll see to it,” replied Sir Henry, who had the utmost admiration for her shooting, smoking, slang, and other peculiarities, and was of opinion that the possession of such a *rara avis* of a woman conferred an enviable distinction on the man who was fortunate enough to own her as his wife.

“Thanks, then I’ll dismiss that anxiety from my mind,” returned Lady Jane. “I say, Chloe, you’d much better come too and do as I do. Try baccy first and shooting afterwards. I bet any money you won’t have anything better to do all day, and I’ll supply you with the materials if you’ll only come. I’m sure you’d like my gun—it’s a beautifully light little affair and throws as true as can be. And in the way of cigarettes I’ve some undeniable *Brillantes* to offer you. Do you know I believe that civilisation expressly provided for women’s smoking by endowing them with hair-pains; a hair-pin often comes so wonderfully handy to a smoker—and so does a knitting pin, too, which is another female attribute.”

Lady Jane was rather in the habit of pressing other women to be as independent of conventionalities as herself, and of deploring

the small number whom she could persuade to follow her example. But she did not really wish anything of the kind, and only pretended to do so because she thought it was a pretence that went well with the free and easy character she had chosen to adopt. In truth nothing would have annoyed her more than to have any rival to make her look to her laurels in the fast and masculine style she affected, and in which she had hitherto distanced all competitors; for she considered laurels to be laurels even though gathered from a peculiar and not generally admired bush of her own, and the idea of seeing her own or a similar wreath on the head of some one else was quite intolerable to her. She had before this made believe to want Chloe to join her, but the latter had not cared to accept the invitation, and when Lady Jane now renewed it she fully

expected to hear it declined as heretofore. Chloe, however, was in a thoroughly altered and unusual mood, and ready to welcome the idea of any novelty or excitement—anything to distract her thoughts from herself and her troubles if possible. Besides this with the shooters there would be a refuge from the endless discussion of Roger's engagement, which was sure to go on all day amongst the ladies in the house; so she replied, to Lady Jane's surprise and disgust,—

“Very well—so I will. Many thanks for the offer. But how about a licence—sha'n't I get into trouble if I shoot without one?”

“Oh, you needn't bother your head about that,” answered the other lady, who could not now draw back without endangering her reputation for frank, manly heartiness. “The chances are you don't kill much at a first go off; and even if you did, I daresay

none of us would be so unkind as to tell tales to your brother-in-law—of course we should have to keep that sort of thing dark from a man who's so confoundedly hard upon poachers, you know—ha! ha! Well, come along and have a smoke then! I'm quite awfully charmed to find hopes of meeting with a congenial spirit in you, after all, Chloe. There's such a precious lot of women who haven't the pluck to be honest and do what they like if it's anything that isn't just the fashion to be done. The woman who sits at home doing crewels and crotchet when she'd give her eyes to be shooting, or fishing, or hunting is a miserable sham, to my mind—and I do detest shams from the bottom of my soul!”

All very well to talk like this. It sounded well, and gave the impression that Lady Jane might perhaps really be one of the few

sincere people in the world. Yet even while the words were being uttered, the speaker's mind was busied in revolving how she should contrive to disgust Chloe with masculine pursuits if she were to show too great an aptitude for them. Of this jealousy, however, Chloe had not the least suspicion, and never dreamt of the great disquietude that she caused to Lady Jane before the day was over. For the alarm her ladyship had felt at Chloe's unexpected and prompt acceptance of her proposal increased to a serious extent as she discovered that the young neophyte could relish a strongish cigarette—tramp steadily through a day's shooting undaunted by briars, mud, or roughness—and had a very good idea not only of letting off a gun but also of hitting what she aimed at. Lady Jane could do no less than affect to applaud this prowess heartily ; but in her

secret soul she was overwhelmed with dismay at having found a pupil capable of treading so closely upon her heels, and felt that she had made a most grievous mistake in having tempted such a girl as that away from the crewels and crotchet, and done anything to give her a taste for other amusements. "If the girl goes on as she has begun, and if she takes to strong language as well, whatever *am* I to do?" reflected her ladyship in consternation.

She might have been less disturbed, however, could she have looked into poor Chloe's heart and seen what was passing there. Then she would have known how small was the interest Chloe took in her occupations—how all her shooting, smoking, talking, and joking were merely desperate and futile efforts to shake off a dull, blank pain that ached on steadily in heart and brain in spite

of all she could do—how she was haunted through the live-long day by a dreary, miserable consciousness of a possible joy that was irretrievably lost—and how she seemed to hear the melancholy words, too late! too late! sounding constantly in her ears. She was too proud to let herself break down and become maudlin. But she found the incessant struggle to keep up and behave as usual a weary task; and on that and many succeeding days she would long with an intense longing for the daylight to go—for bedtime to come—for her to be at length relieved from the prying, unsympathetic, irritating gaze of human beings.





CHAPTER VIII.

TIT FOR TAT.

NOW wonderfully enlivening is the effect that a prospective wedding has upon a household! Whispering, suppressed laughter, and giggling are heard from cellar to attic; much rushing from place to place goes on as Sarah Ann and Jemima pause in their duties to hold confidential communications together and then hurry back to their neglected posts at the approach of authority; work is done with unwonted zeal—even such as would on ordinary occasions be considered “quite out

of my proper spear, and what in my place didn't ought to be expected of me!" Subordinates produce bright suggestions which are graciously received and acted upon by their superiors; every one is disposed to be good-tempered, light-hearted, and willing; in short, a general atmosphere of cheerful bustle pervades the house, and seems to have become as much a part of it as the very stones of which it is built. And Hazel Hall was not behindhand in giving itself up to this state of joyous commotion in honour to Miss Farren's engagement to Mr Lloyd.

Roger was naturally anxious to have as little delay as possible before entering into possession of that crown of existence—a wife—which he had for so long regarded as essential to his happiness; and as there were no hindrances or obstacles of any kind

to be smoothed away, the wedding was to take place very soon. Preparations were hurried on; and every member but one of the household readily fell under the influence of the prevailing state of pleasurable excitement, and did his or her best to assist at whatever might be needful to give fitting *éclat* to the brilliant marriage which "our young lady" was about to make—a marriage which appeared to be regarded as in some mysterious way creditable to all connected with her, and caused a glow of vague self-approval in the bosom of even the stable boy.

One exception there was, however, to the exhilaration of the Hazel Hall establishment—one dark spot in its otherwise bright and smiling appearance. The butler Richards manifested no interest whatever in what went on, would lend no helping hand where



extra aid might be required, consorted with his fellow-creatures no more than was absolutely necessary, declined to discuss either the happy pair or the wedding arrangements, kept wholly aloof from the general gush of geniality, and passed his time chiefly by himself in the pantry. There he would sit in sullen solitude—wronged, vindictive, nursing his indignation at having been deceived, and ever casting about for means of assuaging the craving for revenge that seemed wearing his very life out, and for the gratification of which he longed as intensely as a starving man does for food. He was in a wretched and morbid condition of both mind and body, and was convinced that nothing would go right with him till he should have contented the demands of the demon of unsatisfied vengeance which had entered into him and gave him no peace. Depressed, rest-

less, jaundiced, and miserable, he looked forward to no possibility of regaining his ordinary state until he should be able to feel that the person by whom he had been befooled had been made to suffer for it.

His work was not neglected, but it was done sulkily and morosely ; and he was incessantly occupied in striving to determine upon some definite and satisfactory method of revenge. Somehow he found this strangely hard to do, and had never before experienced so much difficulty in arranging and controlling his thoughts. Hazy suggestions and outlines of possible schemes came to him in abundance ; but he could trace none of them further than the commencement, after which they would grow blurred and misty, and mingle with one another in an inextricable tangle. Whenever he tried to follow up an idea steadily, it was sure either to snap off short ;

or else suddenly to assume some totally different, weird, uncanny aspect; or else to slip away and become merged in that general sense of suffering under gross and unavenged injury which was haunting him and making existence a burden. He tried whether drinking more than his usual quantity of spirits would clear his brain; but found it of no use. He was in a state of mental dulness which he could not make out at all. He had never felt quite the same thing before, and was perplexed, annoyed, and half-alarmed at it. But through it all his one fixed purpose remained unchanged, and he was resolved to be revenged by-and-by.

He had not got hold of the idea he wanted as yet, but it must surely come in time, he thought, and whenever it did come he felt sure that he would recognise and act upon it. Sooner or later he must cer-

tainly be able to relieve his mind of its load, in spite of all the horrible mists and cobwebs that hindered and bothered him so unaccountably just now.

The failure of his first application to his master on the subject of the coveted farm had not prevented him from repeating the claim for what he considered ought to be his, not by favour but by right. But he had not succeeded. Mr Farren airily ignored his promise; insisted that what he had said must have been completely misunderstood; declared furthermore that he had as good as settled to let the farm to an excellent farmer who had applied for it, and who would be a first-rate tenant; and finally refused to listen to anything more about the matter.

The offended butler had then been very much inclined to throw up the situation immediately but had been deterred by the

reflection that if he were to leave the house he would add considerably to the difficulty of finding means to gratify the thirst for revenge that consumed him. No—he would not go away, but would remain on the spot till a suitable way of paying off his grudge should present itself to him, and enable him to regain his peace of mind and be once more happy. And so he stayed on at Hazel Hall, and grew daily more and more dark, gloomy, and sour, as his mind reverted constantly to the broken promise by which he had been deluded and caused to lose both of the two farms that had taken his fancy, and on obtaining one or other of which he had confidently reckoned.

The general elation of spirits in the house at Edith's engagement increased his evil humour, for it angered him to be brought in contact with good temper and jollity when

he himself had such good cause to be displeased. Gaiety seemed to him foolish and out of place in such a lying, unjust world, which must be hopelessly crooked and out of joint for things to go on in it as they did. What right had a man, who had behaved like Mr Farren, to meet with good fortune for himself or any of his family? Had his daughter run away with a scamp, married against his wishes, or in any way so conducted herself as to bring disgrace and trouble upon him, then Richards would have exulted in the righteous judgment that had overtaken Mr Farren, and would have readily forwarded the affair by any means in his power. But instead of this she was going to rejoice her father's heart with so desirable a son-in-law as Mr Lloyd—a man who would some day, so it was said, be an earl in addition to the unusual advantages which

he already possessed ! That such a piece of luck should have fallen to Mr Farren's lot seemed to Richards perfectly intolerable, and sometimes excited him to such fury that he would grind his teeth together, and swear as he thought of it. Utterly disgusted at everything, and wholly given up to "the study of revenge, immortal hate," his nearest approach to pleasure was to sit in sombre loneliness, drinking quantities of brandy, which did him all the more harm for being thus consumed in unsociable solitude, with none of the cheerful talking and laughter which may perhaps go some way towards digesting strong liquors, and helping to mitigate their evil effects. He was impatient and troubled at the unnaturally slow and cloudy state of mind which made him so strangely unable to master and think out any definite plan of vengeance ; but though

he fought against this mental condition with all his might, he had so far failed to get the better of it, and all his cogitations had, as yet, produced no result.

It happened that one night at dinner Roger Lloyd asked something as to the state of agricultural prospects in that neighbourhood, which was a subject whereon Mr Farren believed himself to be a great authority, and greatly loved to lay down the law. He was in a chronic state of imagining that agricultural depression was always extremely prevalent, whatever the real facts might be, and he promptly launched out into a long statement of his pet theory—in support of which he adduced all the proofs he could think of. Amongst these proofs he instanced his farm at Grayford, which was, he said, vacant, and likely so to continue as far as he could see, as no farmer had applied for



it since the death of the late tenant. This of course showed that what he had lately been telling Richards in regard to that same farm had been a lie, and if he had recollected that the man was then in the room waiting at table he would have been more careful about what he said. But in the heat of his discourse he quite forgot the presence of servants—as people are very apt to do when they get excited over any discussion at dinner—and the butler heard and treasured up the incautious speech.

So there had never been any one except himself after Grayford then, as he had been fool enough to believe—for the curiously confiding man had not thought of doubting what his master told him)—and he had merely been put off with the first lie that had come handy! It was a fresh, grievous

offence—a fresh revelation of double-dealing—a fresh provocation which stung and maddened him anew. The fillip which this gave him, seemed to take effect in clearing his brain; for when the evening's work was done and he sat alone staring moodily into the fire and revolving what he had heard, he felt a change beginning to come over him; his reasoning powers were returning; he could grasp and hold thoughts with some firmness; his intellect was able to put things clearly before him, unconfused by the former fantastic, kaleidoscope-like changes. Hurrah! now at last he was surely about to see his way.

He thought he would find it an assistance to go into the whole history of the grievance and make sure that he had everything right in his head as he went on. To begin at the very beginning then, what was the

wrong from which he had suffered? Clearly it was the being robbed of a particular thing which he hoped for and which would have made him happy. Then how neat and appropriate a form of revenge it would be to rob Mr Farren of whatever *he* had most set *his* heart upon—obviously that would be no more than just! Only the difficulty was to settle what thing there was the loss of which would be likely most effectually to interfere with his happiness. Over this knotty point Richards pondered for a while without coming to any satisfactory conclusion, till he suddenly remembered what pride and satisfaction Mr Farren took in the grand match his daughter was about to make. How glorious it would be to disappoint him in this matter—to prevent the marriage, and cause his hopes to come to nothing!

It was really an excellent idea, and the butler rubbed his hands gleefully and laughed out loud with delight at having hit upon it. What a comfort it was to be able once more to follow out a thought and reason on it without finding it constantly shift about and get obscured in something else! Now he had at last got a definite plan set before him, and knew what to try for.

Having made up his mind as far as this, he paused to enjoy a self-congratulatory glass of spirits, and then applied himself to the consideration of how his intention was to be carried out. Would it do to send an anonymous letter containing some fearful slander against either the bride or bridegroom? It might answer, no doubt, but he did not feel very confident about it. He had both heard and read of marriages

being broken off by this method; but then, too, it had sometimes failed of its object—and a failure would not suit him at all, for then he would have all to do over again, and have to endure his present condition of misery for ever so much longer. As for the chance of being found out and punished, that had no weight at all with him; his dread of failure arose from no fear of consequences of that kind, but only from the horror he had of his task remaining undone, and of finding himself no further advanced with it after all his endeavours.

If he could see his way to succeeding with an anonymous letter there was certainly this to be said in its favour, that since it was by deceit he had himself been injured, there would be an especial suitability in employing the same weapon to retaliate on

his enemy. But then he couldn't make up his mind how it ought to be done. Should a letter be sent to Miss Farren? or Mrs Lloyd? or both? And what sort of slander would be most effective? and about whom should it be? Whatever it were there would have to be some decent appearance of confirmatory evidence to support it, as inquiries would be sure to be made. Altogether there seemed so many objections and difficulties in the way that he thought he had better give up this plan and try and discover some better one.

But his inventive powers were exhausted, and after vainly racking his brain and poring over the subject till the night was far gone, he found himself, to his great disgust, relapsing into his former haziness. No fresh notions occurred to him, and his thoughts took to

slipping about as wildly and uncontrollably as the feet of a person making a first attempt to skate. As he felt the hateful, stupid light-headedness getting the better of him again, he wrestled with it frantically, and made desperate efforts to compel his wandering mind to stick to one line of thought till he should have arrived at some definite conclusion regarding it. To no purpose, however. He was again haunted by queer, swiftly-changing, ill-defined outlines of ideas that gave him the impression of being in some strange way tangible phenomena and solid flesh and blood rather than mere thoughts. They came and went at their own will — now rushing up tumultuously and towering over him like overwhelming giants, and then fading away in an instant to nothing, or receding to a remote obscurity where they were hardly to be distinguished and

yet were consciously present. He was firmly convinced of being bound to stop the projected wedding by some means or other ; but beyond that he could perceive nothing plainly in the bewildering turmoil of his mind. At last he gave up the struggle and got into bed, sorely vexed and harassed at the return of the restless, fantastic shadows that gathered round and hindered him, and yet feeling that he had managed to get at least one step nearer his goal in spite of them.

All night long his dreams were full of the theme that had been engrossing him, and he kept continually imagining himself to be some person or thing connected with it. Now he would be Edith—now Mr Farren—now Roger—now the whole wedding-party at once, and terribly confused and distracted with having the anxieties of so many different people all concentrated in his one person. Then again

he would believe himself to be a letter that was to do great mischief, and would be extremely troubled because he could not get himself folded, or directed, or delivered as he wished. Or else perhaps he would be the writer of the letter, and find the words change, become illegible, or vanish as fast as he wrote them down. Again and again did he partially arouse himself, bathed in perspiration, groaning with an unutterable sense of vague pain and distress, struggling vainly to realise who and where he was, and not awake enough to extricate himself from the startling visions that had taken hold of him, to comprehend his own identity, or even to be certain that he was a man at all and not some inanimate object.

When daylight at last put an end to these feverish, nightmare - haunted slumbers, he gradually pulled himself together and collected

his ideas. He was able to start exactly from where he had left off the night before, and could not get one atom further. That is to say, he was still quite certain that the one important object he had to accomplish, was to frustrate the marriage, but all else was shadowy and indistinct, and how his purpose was to be executed he could by no means imagine.

He went about his usual avocations of laying the table, taking in breakfast, etc., mechanically, and because he was in the habit of performing those duties; but had they required of him any exercise of reasoning power or conscious act of volition they would have gone undone, for his mind was occupied by three predominant ideas too exclusively to leave room in it for any others. These three ideas were—first, that he had been wronged; secondly, that he must be

revenged ; thirdly, that this must be accomplished by putting an end to the wedding somehow or other.

Mr Farren and Mr Lloyd were engaged to shoot at a place near by on that day ; but at the last moment the former decided to stay at home as he did not feel quite well, and so Mr Lloyd went without him. Mr Farren's change of plan caused some delay in getting off, and Roger and the keeper—who accompanied him—were so late in starting that the latter had not time to put away Mr Farren's gun then, and left it in the pantry till he should return in the evening.

At the time Richards took no particular notice of this more than of anything else that went on ; but in the course of the morning the gun caught his eye more than once and attracted him curiously. At first

he only glanced at it in a dull, uninterested manner, but presently he was seized with the idea that it was speaking to him and saying something he did not understand. He stopped and looked at it doubtfully, trying to comprehend what it meant. But that was beyond him; for though he felt quite certain it was conveying something or other to his mind, yet what that something was he could not at all discover. After a while the gun drew him to it so strongly that looking at it only could not satisfy him without handling it also. He took it up and asked aloud what it wanted to tell him—and one of the maids who chanced to overhear him speaking as she passed by the door, and who knew he was alone, declared that the man must be cracked to go talking out loud to his own self just as if he were somebody else, and that his voice sounded so strange

it made her, "all in a tremble like," to hear him.

The wild night he had passed made him more inclined for drinking than eating, and when dinner-time came he had no appetite, but was parched with thirst. Instead, therefore, of going into dinner in the hall with the other servants as usual, he stayed in the pantry and had some brandy and water. This he drank slowly and without relish, staring hard at the gun meanwhile with a sort of dull wonder as to what charm there could be that made it so impossible for him to keep his eyes off it; and feeling also impatient rage that his brain would not get clear as it used to be. He was quite sure it all arose from his not having yet had the vengeance he had promised himself—no doubt he would feel all right again directly he had had that. What a fool he had been

ever to trust to such a liar as Mr Farren! Never mind—the deceit should be punished, he would take care that his master was paid out in his own coin at last, and learnt what it was to have snatched away from him the prize which he deemed already as good as his own! This fine wedding of his daughter's must certainly not be allowed to take place. But how aggravating it was not to be able to see how its breaking off was to be accomplished! And again Richards began vainly trying to seize and hold fast some one out of the many shadowy phantoms that kept flitting to and fro before him and eluding his grasp.

The unaccountable fascination of the gun made him go up to it and take it in his hands again. Suddenly, whilst he held it, a light seemed to break in upon him, and he was penetrated with a sense of at length

understanding the meaning of what it had been saying to him before—a meaning which he had hitherto been too dense to take in! It had been showing him all day a far safer and surer method for stopping the marriage than any number of anonymous letters! Why, all he had to do was to put in a cartridge—aim the gun at one of two people—pull the trigger—and then the task would be done, and he could go and taunt Mr Farren with the downfall of his hopes. There was the very thing for his purpose all ready to his hand—and he so blind and stupid as never to have perceived it till this moment. It was all as simple and easy as could be. Yet he shivered as he thought how nearly he had lost this chance; for if he had waited till evening the keeper would have returned and taken away the gun, and it might be some time before such a favour-

able opportunity would occur again. But he wouldn't be such a silly as to let this one escape him ; luckily there was still plenty of time, and he might look forward to having had his revenge and cleared the load off his mind before sunset.

Should he choose the bride or the bridegroom as his mark ? After a minute or so of deliberation he decided it should be Edith. For one thing the death of an only child would surely cause Mr Farren more poignant grief than that of a comparative stranger ; and for another thing it might be late before Mr Lloyd came back from shooting, which would cause Richards an intolerable amount of delay about carrying out his project. Now that he had definitely made up his mind what to do he was in a fever of impatience to reach the happy moment when the passion that had so long tormented him

should be satisfied, and he should be able to exult in beholding his master's punishment.

The next thing was to find out where Miss Farren was, and what she was going to do that afternoon. Taking up a coal scuttle to give him a pretence of being busy with the fires, he went from one to the other of sitting-rooms in search of her. She was not in the boudoir as usual, nor yet in the study with her father, nor yet in the drawing-room. Mrs Farren was sitting there alone, and whilst Richards was in the act of making up the fire, Edith looked into the room with her walking things on.

"Why, my dear Edith!" cried her mother, "you're never going out, are you? That box of trousseau things from Paris has just arrived, and I thought you and I were going to have such a nice afternoon together, unpacking and looking at them."

Edith gave a discontented shrug to her shoulders.

“So I thought too,” replied she; “I’m sure it would be fifty times pleasanter than going out. Only you see Roger told me this morning that he meant to come back from shooting by Grayford, and suggested that it would be very nice if I were to walk out in that direction and meet him, so that we could come back together. I didn’t want to go at all, and I didn’t say I would; but still he’ll be expecting me to some extent, and is sure to be very pleased if I’m there, and as there’s something I particularly want to coax out of him, I think it’ll be wise of me to go. He’ll take my being there as a compliment, and that’ll put him in a good temper to start with, and make him all the more inclined to do what I want. And as I’m out of stamps I’m going rather early,

so as to go round by the post office first, and then afterwards to wait for him at Grayford."

"Oh—well it can't be helped then, I suppose," said Mrs Farren with a sigh; "but it's very provoking too."

"A *horrid* bore I call it," rejoined Edith with emphasis; "it was *too* unlucky that he should have wanted me just when all those lovely new things are come! I'm sure I hope he won't be expecting me to potter about with him eternally after we're married, for it would bore me frightfully. Of course he's a dear good fellow, and I'm as fond of him as can be, you know—but I can't say I find him very lively company. Not that I expected anything different, however, because Chloe was always bored with him, and thought him stupid and babyish; and she's so seldom wrong, that after that his being dull doesn't surprise me a bit. One can

have *everything* in a man — more's the pity !”

So saying Edith took herself off, and by the time Richards had disposed of the coal scuttle and got back to the pantry she was out of the house. But that did not matter—he knew where to find her, and quickly resolved what he would do. A quiet place where there was no chance of interruption would suit him better than any other, and Grayford was as quiet as need be now that there was no one at the farm. There was an especial fitness, too, in selecting that spot as the scene of revenge ; he could easily get there before her whilst she was going round by the post office. The moment for which he had panted so long was very near at hand now. He would soon be back with startling news for Mr Farren—soon be gratified with the spectacle of his master's distress. There was a horrible de-

light in the thought, and Richards trembled with eagerness for the grim enjoyment to which he looked forward.

He loaded the gun and left the pantry with it in his hand. Just as he reached the house door it struck him that he ought to take an extra cartridge or so for fear of the first missing fire, so he turned back and put a couple more in his pocket. Passing through the stable-yard and out beyond the grounds he was noticed by one or two of the men belonging to the place, who rather wondered to see the butler walking along with a gun. But as he was well known to be queer tempered, and a ticklish customer to deal with, they did not care to question or meddle with him. Maybe he was only taking the gun somewhere for Mr Farren, and it was all quite right and proper—any way it was no business of theirs; so they let him go on his way without interference.

When he reached Grayford he turned out of the road and got behind a hedge to await Edith's arrival.

It must be remembered that he had not a vestige of ill-feeling against this girl whom he intended to murder. As far as her own identity was concerned he neither liked nor disliked her more than if she had been an automaton, and she was interesting to him solely as the channel through which to strike at her father. That Richards should have any twinge of pity for her was impossible, for the simple reason that there was no place for such a feeling in a mind that had been so completely given up to the lust of vengeance as his had been. For vengeance he had craved and hungered ; upon vengeance he had dwelt as the greatest good to be desired ; and thus vengeance had become his idol and assumed more and more monstrous proportions till it

had sucked the sap and juice out of all healthful emotions and left them dried up and lifeless. The troublesome shadows that had dazed him for so long had departed. Three things only—his wrong, his revenge, and the means by which it was to be wrought, stood boldly and clearly outlined in his mental vision—something as objects might do in a cavern illuminated by the ghastly glare of the electric light streaming full upon them alone and leaving all else in pitchy darkness.

It was time for her to come. What kept her so long? Could any mischance have hindered her from doing as she had intended?

Hark! There is a step along the road. But it is the tread of a heavy masculine foot, and as the butler peered out through the hedge behind which he had established himself, he saw that the new comer was the

village policeman going his rounds. The man looked neither to right nor left as he tramped along with a stolidly important air, thinking only of the Mary Jane he was courting, and never dreaming there could be any danger of a great crime being committed in his district. Why should he? He had been on that beat for years without such a thing happening, and why should he expect it to-day more than any other day? So the rural guardian of the peace continued his course tranquilly. It might have been thought that the sight of the well-known blue coat and helmet would have suggested some fear of justice and penalty to the intending criminal. But no; nothing could distract his mind for an instant from the terrible purpose that had brought him there.

After the departure of the policeman the

road was silent and deserted as before. Richards' nervous anxiety for the appearance of Edith grew so intense as to be well-nigh uncontrollable. Would she *never* come? He would have set out towards the post office to look for her, only that he knew there was a cut across fields by which he might miss her if he were to move from his present place; so he forced himself to stay quiet, and strained his eyes eagerly in the direction whence she was to be expected.

Presently appeared the top of a female hat just showing over the even line of the newly cut-down hedge that bounded the road. Who was the wearer? She was evidently walking slowly, and often standing still. He watched the approaching bit of hat in breathless excitement. Why didn't it come faster? He ground his teeth in an

ecstasy of impatience, and uttered a low, fierce, shuddering sort of growl, that was more like the sound of some wild beast than of a human being. A minute or two at farthest must bring the person into sight, yet he could hardly endure the suspense of uncertainty for even that short period. Bitterly did he curse whoever had plashed that hedge. Why hadn't the ignorant fool cut it lower so that a man might see over it? Ah! she was close to a gateway over which he would be able to see the face and make sure who it was. She reached the opening, and he drew a long breath of relief when he perceived the wearer of the hat to be Miss Farren.

The girl was sauntering along, knowing it was still too early for her betrothed to be there to meet her, and little suspecting how instead of him there waited one to

fulfil the words of Scripture, that "the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children."

As Richards recognised her his black eyes flashed joyfully, and he cocked the gun and raised it to his shoulder. His hand had been shaking before, but now that the crisis had come it was tolerably steady, and to make his aim still more sure he rested the barrels of the weapon on the solid banking of the hedge.

A few steps further and she is just in front of him. There is a flash, a report, a faint scream, a fall, and it is all over. What had the instant before been Edith Farren with all life and happiness before her, now lies a lifeless heap upon the road.

To the maniac, driven mad by drink and passion, who had done the dreadful deed,

her death was no more than a sort of accidental detail—a mere necessary preliminary, towards the satisfaction which he coveted. The crowning part, the completion of his design, the supreme gratification he anticipated would be when he should see his master crushed by misfortune, and be able to triumph over him for the loss of his daughter and of all the social glories and distinctions which she was to have conferred upon her family, and to cast in his teeth that he had only his own falsehood to thank for what had happened. Therefore Richards did not linger by his victim's body longer than was necessary to ascertain that she was really dead and his work so far complete, and then he left the spot at once, and began hurrying back to Hazel Hall. At every step he took he was busily picturing the scene that was now going to take place

between his master and himself. Of course Mr Farren would be in his study or his dressing-room as he had not been well. There Richards would go to him and force him to listen whether he liked it or not; there should be no escape, and he should hear all that the butler had to say, even if it were necessary to lock the door to prevent his getting away before it was over. How would Mr Farren take the news? Would he cry out? or sink down at once quite overwhelmed by the blow? Would he be violent? struggle? try to resist hearing all the taunts that were to be heaped upon him? Anyhow, it would be well to be ready for whatever might happen; and, thinking this, Richards reloaded the discharged gun-barrel with one of the extra cartridges he had brought.

He was quite mistaken as to the place

where his master would be found, for that gentleman—feeling pretty well again—had gone out for fresh air, and was taking a turn in the direction by which Roger was likely to return, when he observed a man coming towards him evidently in a state of great excitement, with a gun in his hand, and muttering to himself as he went. Mr Farren was considerably astonished to perceive that this man was none other than his treasure of a servant, Richards, who certainly at that moment presented a most unprepossessing appearance. His eyes gleamed out wildly from under the overshadowing, straight, bushy eyebrows; his rough, dry, black hair was drier and more dishevelled than ever; his thick, sallow complexion looked unnaturally yellow against the clean-shaved, blue-black chin that contrasted with it; and from time to time he brandished

the gun about with an extraordinary gesture of triumphant delight.

“Why, Richards!” exclaimed Mr Farren as soon as he had made out who the new comer was; “what on earth are you doing with that gun, and where have you been?”

The man started violently, for he had not before noticed his master’s presence. The unexpected meeting irritated and disconcerted him, because it put out his calculations by disarranging the scene he had been planning and had laid in the house. He came a little nearer, stood still, and laughed.

“That’s a tremendous fine match as Miss Edith’s a-going to make now, isn’t it?” said he with a sneer. “As rich as can be to start with, and going to be a countess some day into the bargain—so they say. Don’t it feel wonderful grand to think as you’re going to have a countess for your daughter?”

Obviously there was something very odd about the man; and Mr Farren, obeying that instinct of human nature, which prompts it to attribute all eccentricities to drink unless otherwise explained, made up his mind that Richards was the worse for liquor.

“What are you talking about?” returned the gentleman sharply. “Why don’t you answer me straight when I ask you a question, instead of giving me a farrago of nonsense about other matters?”

Richards had meant to lead up gradually to what he had to say—only to hint at it at first—to arouse his master’s fears—to keep him in suspense—to torment him and protract his agony as much as possible. But now that the culminating point of the revenge was so very near, the butler felt unable to postpone his anticipated pleasure one moment



longer—he must taste at once the sweet drop for which he had thirsted.

“D— you!” he screamed, giving his fury unchecked course; “I’m not talking nonsense, I’m only reminding you of all your fine prospects before I tells you they’re at an end! I’ve took ’em from you just because you took my farm from me—and done it at that very same place too. You’d have been all right enough if you’d treated me on the square, but now your daughter won’t never marry Mr Lloyd—nor no one else neither; this jolly old gun and I have taken care of that between us over there at Grayford! You cheated me of what I wanted—how do you like being cheated yourself? Ah, ha! are you beginning to wish as you hadn’t made a fool of me?”

Mr Farren felt thoroughly confirmed in his first impression. Evidently the man

was roaring drunk and had not a notion of what he was saying.

“I’m not going to talk to you whilst you’re in this disgraceful condition,” said the master sternly. “Give me up that gun, and go off to the house, and don’t let me see you again till you’re sober. Then perhaps I’ll hear if you’ve anything to say for yourself.”

This conduct increased the butler’s rage tenfold by giving him a sense of partial failure; for how was he to have the full triumph and gratification he had reckoned on, until he could make Mr Farren believe his story?

“Sober!” he shouted; “I’m as sober as yourself, and not such an infernal liar! I tell you she’s dead—stone dead—I and the gun ’ve made her so. Go to Grayford, and then you’ll see what’s become of all you think yourself so safe of.”

The two men had drawn nearer and nearer to each other while speaking, and were by this time quite close together.

“Drunken scoundrel!” said Mr Farren contemptuously, trying to seize hold of the gun.

The butler sprung back a foot or two.

An access of ungovernable, savage frenzy came over him, and calling out, “Will this teach you to believe me, then?” He fired both barrels full into his master’s breast, and the latter fell to the ground mortally wounded. When some people who had heard the noise of the gun came running to the spot they found Richards sitting by Mr Farren’s corpse, chuckling and grinning complacently. On seeing the strangers approach he was in no wise discomposed, but only pointed to the body with a look of immense satisfaction, observing,—

“There’s the worst liar as ever you saw, now ; but I’ve paid him off at last. Through him I lost the thing as *I* looked for, and so through me he’s lost what *he* looked for. That’s tit for tat, and all fair.” Then suddenly a scared look came into his face and he sprang up, shrieking in horror, “Ah, the shadows, the shadows! I thought they couldn’t come again when I was even with him—but I see them gathering! They’re all around—they’re coming closer—take them away—save me from them! Ah, why won’t you help me? they’re upon me and are blinding me! I can see nothing clearly any more!”

When the news of the terrible tragedy reached Castell Eithin it was scarcely strange that the forgotten prophecy of the clairvoyante should have returned to Chloe’s mind,

or that Peggy should have deemed her favourite superstition about the *canwyll-corff* to have received ample confirmation. She held forth upon the subject with great gusto, asking what more proof any one could want that the lights Miss Farren had seen when she was there, were really and truly *canwyll-corff*? and declaring that no man in his senses would think of wanting to marry whoever had seen them when he must know it was a chance if she lived till the wedding, and that at any rate she would be bound to go directly after. Though no one mustn't think as she, Peggy, was wishing to cast no reflections on poor Mr Lloyd, seeing how likely it was as when he asked Miss Farren to marry him he knew nothing about what she had seen just before.

Thus the fruits of the seed sown by Mr Farren tended materially to encourage the

growth of two varieties of superstition—that famous off-shoot from the parent root humbug. No wonder that a plant which is so skilful at self-propagation should be found cropping up in all directions, and branching out and overrunning the whole world!





CHAPTER IX.

LET'S GET UP A CRUSADE AGAINST HUMBUG!

TWO years have elapsed since the events recorded in the last chapter. In a reserved compartment of a train speeding from Cwm Eithin to London, a newly-married couple are seated together in fulness of content, and rejoicing greatly that that day's ordeal of wedding breakfast, speeches, and fuss is got through.

"Roger," says the lady, "I'd no idea you were such a good speaker. Why, when you returned thanks for our healths, you spoke clearly, and straight to the point, and said

just the right thing in about thirty or forty words, and didn't stammer one bit as almost every one else does in similar circumstances. You're quite the best bridegroom I've ever seen. But, good luck! did you ever in your days hear such rubbish as most of the people talked? And what a deluge of butter was smeared over every one in proportion to their relative importance to the occasion! You and I had it in hogsheads, your mother and Alice and Cadwallader in firkins, and the parsons and bridesmaids in pounds! Ah—there was just one exception—no one buttered the best man that I can remember. What could have been the use of it all? Not one of the speakers meant what they said, and nobody supposed them to mean it either. It was only very silly of them to take the trouble to invent such a lot of insincere stuff which no one believed for a moment. That sort

of humbug seems always to go on as a matter of course when any one's married; but the weddings would be much better without it, I think."

Roger Lloyd laughs.

"I agree with you entirely, Chloe," he replies, "as of course I shall have to do always, now you're my better half. The fact is, the world is so dreadfully saturated with humbug that it comes oozing out in some form or other at every turn. Don Quixote's sister pronounces writing poetry to be '*enfermedad incurable y pegadiza*,' that is to say an incurable and infectious disease, and I think the remark applies still more forcibly to humbug. I'm not quite sure that a very tiny bit would not now and then be useful to help the wheels go round smoothly if people would content themselves with that small amount. But that's just what they never will do—and once

they take to it they won't give it up again, and the sickness spreads further and further with alarming rapidity."

"You don't know," said Chloe, nestling close to his side, "how nearly that sickness once managed to wreck all my happiness—I'll tell you about it some day or other. I've hated humbug more and more ever since then, and it does make me so happy that you hate it too. I do hope you'll be quite, quite as rabid against it as I am, for I'm sure it's horribly dangerous and seductive. Each bit of humbug seems to make another step in the same direction inevitable, and then one deteriorates frightfully. When once a person begins by blunting his moral sense of truth and honesty with endless conventional pretty speeches and such things, from that he slides down hill to deliberate lies at express

pace and grows utterly dead to any feeling of shame at them. Roger! Let's get up a crusade against humbug! I'll be Peter the Hermit and you shall be Godfrey de Bouillon. If we set our faces steadily against it in every shape, perhaps we shall be able to contribute some share—however small—towards making the world a little better than it is. Anyhow we might try, mightn't we? Of course all conventionality would be up in arms against us, and we should be called cracked I suppose—but I daresay we should survive that! And the more influence we are likely to have through our money and position, the more responsible we are for trying to set a good example, you know. Small, or weak-backed people who would like to be honest but don't venture to fall foul of conventionalities and attack shams, may gain courage

when they see bigger people leading the way."

So the train rushes on till it reaches that great home of conventionality, sham, and humbug, London—which is all unsuspecting of the ardent desires for the upsetting and destruction of these things which are seething in the brain of Mrs Roger Lloyd as she sets out upon her honeymoon.

THE END.

1

